

THE BIRDS OF CRESCENT BEACH, NORTH SURREY, B.C.

by **A. L. Grass**, South Burnaby, B.C.

For purposes of this article, Crescent Beach is defined as follows: that area of the municipality of Surrey west of the Deas freeway and south of the Nicomekl river. The area is generally known as the Crescent-Ocean Park peninsula.

Geographically the municipality of Surrey lies in the southwest corner of the mainland of British Columbia. Most of the municipality is independent of the Fraser Valley and is drained by three small streams that flow into Boundary Bay. "The estuaries of these streams, the Nicomekl and the Serpentine," writes Canon Holdom, "must have been the home for countless flocks of waterfowl before the coming of the white man, and in spite of clearing and draining, there is still a goodly number."

It could be said that bird study at Crescent Beach began some 143 years ago, when on Monday, December 13, 1824, a small party of explorers led by Chief Factor MacMillan of the Hudson Bay Company made their way up the Nicomekl river, where they reported seeing "immense flocks of plover". Martin W. Holdom of Crescent Beach considers these to have been Red-backed Sandpipers (*Erolia alpina*). They are still one of the commonest birds on the mud flats in winter.

It would be impossible to estimate the numbers of observers that have trekked the beaches, dykes, hill, fields and mud flats in search of new and exciting bird adventures, but there is little doubt that the Reverend Martin W. Holdom of Crescent Beach is the pioneer ornithologist of the area. His observations over the past years were published under the titles: "Glimpses of Surrey Bird Life" in 1952 and "Random Bird Notes", also in 1952.

Many changes in the bird populations have occurred during the past 100 years. Canon Holdom makes the

following remarks in his "Glimpses of Surrey Bird Life" regarding this problem:

"with the clearing of the coniferous forest and the growth of deciduous trees there has been a great influx of small land birds. The introduction of insect pests and weeds provide food for the sparrows and warblers. For example the American Goldfinch is common during the summer. It was probably unknown before the settlers introduced the dandelion."

Another aspect of the change resulting from the clearing of coniferous forests is the destruction of a formerly magnificent Great Blue Heron colony that once existed at Ocean park.

There are five main habitat areas at Crescent Beach at the present time:

1. Ocean waters (salt chuck)
2. Mud flats
3. Dykes
4. Fields
5. Bushy hillsides

The large numbers of waterfowl that winter here are typical of the area. Such species as Surf Scoters, Red-breasted Mergansers and Common Goldeneyes are very common during the late fall and winter. The numbers begin to taper off in late spring until by early summer waterfowl are almost non-existent in the area save for a few nesting Mallards.

Mud flats are the collecting grounds for large numbers of shore birds that feed on the crustaceans which abound in the mud. Typical species include the Red-backed Sandpiper, Greater Yellowlegs, Hudsonian Curlew, Western Sandpiper, and Great Blue Heron.

Dykes form the main nesting areas for Red-winged Blackbirds and Mallards. The thick growth of Scotch broom and salmonberry form suitable cover for White-crowned and Golden-

crowned sparrows, various titmice, and Rufous-sided Towhees.

Fields are the homes for species that are found only in these fields. Typical among them is the Western Meadowlark, Short-eared Owl and Marsh Hawk.

Hillsides are pathetic reminders of the magnificent stand of timber that was once Crescent Beach. Pileated, Hairy, and Downy Woodpeckers were once common here before the area was "improved". They are now found occasionally. One of the common species is the Evening Grosbeak which seems to prefer the maples. Warbling Vireos are found in the upper reaches of the Douglas fir trees.

The following account of the birds of Crescent Beach is based upon three years of field work carried out by myself and my good friend Glen Ryder, as well as the personal records of J. Vooy's and D. Wendell, and the accounts given by Canon Martin W. Holdom in his two works previously mentioned.

My authority for nomenclature has been W. Earl Godfrey's "Birds of Canada" (1966). The brief statement following each bird refers to its expected abundance in suitable habitats. Terms are defined as follows:

Abundant — every bird walk in considerable numbers

Common — every bird walk, less numerous than above

Frequent — not every bird walk, but a familiar bird

Rare — of regular occurrence but seldom seen

Casual records are given with dates and names of observers.

THE BIRDS OF CRESCENT BEACH

1. Common Loon *Gavia immer*. Rare summer.
2. Arctic Loon *Gavia arctica*. Rare winter.
3. Yellow-billed Loon *Gavia adamsii*. December 21, 1964 (North Surrey Bird Count).
4. Red-throated Loon *Gavia stellata*. Common winter.
5. Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grise-gena*. Common winter.
6. Horned Grebe *Podiceps auritus*. Common winter.
7. Eared Grebe *Podiceps caspicus*. Abundant winter.
8. Western Grebe *Aechmosporus occidentalis*. Common winter.
9. Pied-billed Grebe *Podilymbus podiceps*. Rare summer and winter.
10. Leach's Petrel *Oceanodroma leucorhoa*. April 17, 1962 (Glen Ryder).
11. Double-crested Cormorant *Phalacrocorax auritus*. Common resident.
12. Brandt's Cormorant *Phalacrocorax penicillatus*. Abundant winter.
13. Pelagic Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pelagicus*. Frequent resident.
14. Great Blue Heron *Ardea herodias*. Common resident.
15. Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*. Rare transient.
16. Snow Goose *Chen caerulescens*. February 26, 1963 (Glen Ryder).
17. Black Brant *Branta bernicla nigricans*. Common winter.
18. Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*. Common resident. Nests on dykes.
19. Pintail *Anas acuta*. Frequent winter.
20. Green-winged Teal *Anas carolinensis*. Common winter.
21. Blue-winged Teal *Anas discors*. Frequent winter.
22. Baldpate *Marca americana*. Common winter.
23. Shoveler *Spatula clypeata*. Frequent winter.
24. Canvasback *Aythya valisineria*. Common winter.
25. Greater Scaup *Aythya marila*. Abundant winter.
26. Lesser Scaup *Aythya affinis*. Rare winter.
27. Common Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula*. Common winter.
28. Barrow's Goldeneye *Bucephala islandica*. Common winter.
29. Bufflehead *Bucephala albeola*. Frequent winter.

30. Oldsquaw *Clangula hyemalis* Frequent winter.
31. Harlequin Duck *Histrionicus histrionicus*. Rare winter.
32. White-winged Scoter *Melanitta deglandi*. Frequent winter.
33. Surf Scoter *Melanitta perspicillata*. Abundant winter.
34. Common Scoter *Oidemia nigra*. Frequent winter.
35. Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis*. Rare winter.
36. Hooded Merganser *Lophodytes cucullatus*. Rare winter.
37. Common Merganser *Mergus merganser*. Frequent resident.
38. Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator*. Common winter.
39. Sharp-shinned Hawk *Accipiter striatus*. Frequent winter.
40. Cooper's Hawk *Accipiter cooperi*. Rare resident.
41. Red-tailed Hawk *Buteo jamaicensis*. Rare resident.
42. Rough-legged Hawk *Buteo lagopus*. Rare transient.
43. Bald Eagle *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*. Rare.
44. Marsh Hawk *Circus cyaneus*. Rare resident.
45. Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*. Rare summer.
46. Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*. Rare. One record by Martin W. Holdom (Glimpses of Surrey Bird Life, p. 5) in which he says: "while making my way along the dyke to the farthest field, a favorite resort of shore birds, a dark bird rather larger than a crow with sharp pointed wings, suddenly dashed down scattering flocks of yellowlegs and other sandpipers: a duck hawk of the dark race called 'Peale's' falcon which nest in the Queen Charlotte Islands."
47. Pigeon Hawk *Falco columbarius*. Rare winter.
48. Sparrow Hawk *Falco sparverius*. Frequent resident.
49. Ruffed Grouse *Bonasa umbellus*. Rare resident.
50. Ring-necked Pheasant *Phasianus cochlicus*. Rare resident.
51. American Coot *Fulica americana*. Frequent winter.
52. Semipalmated Plover *Charadrius semipalmatus*. Frequent transient.
53. Killdeer *Charadrius vociferus*. Abundant resident.
54. Black-bellied Plover *Squatarola squatarola*. October 30, 1966 (Al Grass and Glen Ryder).
55. Black Turnstone *Arenaria melanocephala*. Frequent winter.
56. Common Snipe *Capella gallinago*. Rare winter.
57. Long-billed Curlew *Numenius americanus*. Rare transient.
58. Hudsonian Curlew *Numenius phaeopus*. Frequent transient.
59. Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularia*. Frequent summer.
60. Greater Yellowlegs *Totanus melanoleucus*. Frequent transient.
61. Lesser Yellowlegs *Totanus flavipes*. Rare transient.
62. Least Sandpiper *Erolia minutilla*. Frequent transient.
63. Dunlin *Erolia alpina*. Abundant winter.
64. Short-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus griseus*. Frequent transient.
65. Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus*. Transient.
66. Semipalmated Sandpiper *Ereunetes pusillus*. Rare transient.
67. Western Sandpiper *Ereunetes mauri*. Common transient.
68. Sanderling *Crocethia alba*. Abundant winter.
69. Wilson's Phalarope *Stegopus tricolor*. February 26, 1963 (Glen Ryder).
70. Parasitic Jaeger *Stercorarius parasiticus*. Frequent fall transient.
71. Glaucous Gull *Larus hyperboreus*. Rare winter.
72. Glaucous-winged Gull *Larus glaucescens*. Abundant resident.
73. Western Gull *Larus occidentalis*. October 10, 1965 (Al Grass).
74. Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*. Frequent winter.
75. California Gull *Larus californicus*. Common transient.
76. Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis*. Frequent transient.
77. Mew Gull *Larus canus*. Frequent

- summer.
78. Bonaparte's Gull *Larus philadelphia*. Common summer; frequent transient.
 79. Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*. Common fall transient.
 80. Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisica*. Frequent fall transient.
 81. Common Murre *Uria aalge*. Frequent winter.
 82. Pigeon Guillemot *Cepphus columba*. Frequent transient.
 83. Band-tailed Pigeon *Columba fasciata*. Common summer.
 84. Rock Dove *Columba livia*. Abundant introduced resident.
 85. Mourning Dove *Zenaidura macroura*. Rare summer.
 86. Snowy Owl *Nyctea scandiaca* January, 1967 (J. Vooyo).
 87. Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus*. Rare resident.
 88. Common Nighthawk *Chordeiles minor*. Frequent summer.
 89. Black Swift *Cypseloides niger*. Frequent summer.
 90. Rufous Hummingbird *Selasphorus rufus*. Common summer.
 91. Belted Kingfisher *Megaceryle alcyon*. Common resident.
 92. Red-shafted Flicker *Colaptes cafer*. Common resident.
 93. Pileated Woodpecker *Dryocopus pileatus*. Rare resident.
 94. Yellow-bellied Sapsucker *Sphyrapicus varius*. Rare resident.
 95. Lewis' Woodpecker *Asyndesmus lewis*. Rare summer.
 96. Hairy Woodpecker *Dendrocopos villosus*. Rare resident.
 97. Downy Woodpecker *Dendrocopos pubescens*. Frequent resident.
 98. Hammond's Flycatcher *Empidonax hammondii*. Frequent summer.
 99. Olive-sided Flycatcher *Nuttallornis borealis*. Common summer.
 100. Horned Lark *Eremophila alpestris*. Rare resident.
 101. Violet-green Swallow *Tachycineta thalassina*. Abundant summer.
 102. Tree Swallow *Iridoprocne bicolor*. Common summer.
 103. Rough-winged Swallow *Stelgidopteryx ruficollis*. Rare summer.
 104. Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*. Common Summer.
 105. Cliff Swallow *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*. Rare summer.
 106. Steller's Jay *Cyanocitta stelleri*. Frequent resident.
 107. Common Raven *Corvus corax*. Rare resident.
 108. Northwestern Crow *Corvus caurinus*. Common resident.
 109. Black-capped Chickadee *Parus atricapillus*. Abundant resident.
 110. Chestnut-backed Chickadee *Parus rufescens*. Frequent resident.
 111. Common Bushtit *Psaltriparus minimus*. Common resident.
 112. Red-breasted Nuthatch *Sitta canadensis*. Rare resident.
 113. Brown Creeper *Ceritha familiaris*. Rare resident.
 114. House Wren *Troglodytes aedon*. Rare summer.
 115. Winter Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*. Frequent resident.
 116. Bewick's Wren *Thryothorus bewickii*. Frequent resident.
 117. Robin *Turdus migratorius*. Abundant resident.
 118. Varied Thrush *Ixoreus naevius*. Frequent resident.
 119. Hermit Thrush *Hylocichla guttata*. Rare summer.
 120. Swainson's Thrush *Hylocichla ustulata*. Frequent summer.
 121. Golden-crowned Kinglet *Regulus satrapa*. Common resident.
 122. Ruby-crowned Kinglet *Regulus calendula*. Common resident.
 123. Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta*. Common transient; rare winter.
 124. Cedar Waxwing *Bombycilla cedrorum*. Frequent resident.
 125. Northern Shrike *Lanius excubitor*. Rare winter.
 126. Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*. Abundant resident.
 127. Solitary Vireo *Vireo solitarius*. Rare summer.
 128. Warbling Vireo *Vireo gilvus*. April 30, 1967 (Al Grass and D. E. Wendell).
 129. Orange-crowned Warbler *Vermivora celata*. Common summer.
 130. Yellow Warbler *Dendroica petechia*. Common summer.

131. Myrtle Warbler *Dendroica coronata*. Rare transient; February 9, 1966 (Al Grass and Glen Ryder).
132. Audubon's Warbler *Dendroica auduboni*. Common summer.
133. Wilson's Warbler *Wilsonia pusilla*. Common summer; January 1, 1964 (J. Vooy).
134. House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*. Abundant resident.
135. Western Meadowlark *Sturnella neglecta*. Frequent resident.
136. Red-winged Blackbird *Agelaius phoeniceus*. Common resident.
137. Brewer's Blackbird *Euphagus cyanocephalus*. Abundant resident.
138. Brown-headed Cowbird *Molothrus ater*. Common summer. A frequent parasite on the American Goldfinch.
139. Western Tanager *Piranga ludoviciana*. Rare summer.
140. Black-headed Grosbeak *Pheucticus melanocephalus*. Frequent summer.
141. Evening Grosbeak *Hesperiphona vespertina*. Rare summer; frequent winter.
142. Purple Finch *Carpodacus purpureus*. Frequent summer.
143. House Finch *Carpodacus mexicanus*. Abundant resident.
144. Pine Grosbeak *Pinicola enucleator*. February 13, 1953 (M. W. Holdom).
145. Pine Siskin *Spinus pinus*. Common resident.
146. American Goldfinch *Spinus tristis*. Abundant summer; rare winter.
147. Rufous-sided Towhee *Pipilo erythrophthalmus*. Common resident.
148. Savannah Sparrow *Passerculus sandwichensis*. Common summer.
149. Oregon Junco *Junco oregonus*. Frequent resident.
150. Chipping Sparrow *Spizella passerina*. Frequent summer.
151. White-crowned Sparrow *Zonotrichia leucophrys*. Frequent resident.
152. Golden-crowned Sparrow *Zonotrichia atricapilla*. Common transient.
153. Fox Sparrow *Passerella iliaca*. Frequent winter.
154. Song Sparrow *Melospiza melodia*. Abundant resident.
155. Snow Bunting *Plectrophenax nivalis*. Rare transient.

REFERENCES

- Checklist of Vancouver Birds. 1962 edition. Godfrey, W. Earl. 1966. Birds of Canada. NMC Bulletin No. 203.
- Holdom, Martin W. 1952. Random bird notes. Surrey Leader.
- Holdom, Martin W. 1952. Glimpses of Surrey bird life. Surrey Leader.
- Munro, J. A. and I. McT. Cowan, 1947. A review of the bird fauna of British Columbia.

SEVENTH ANNUAL MAY BIRD CENSUS, REGINA

Regina's annual May bird census was taken on May 13, 1967, with a total of 144 species and 14,256 individual birds reported. It is recognized that the number of individual birds counted does not constitute a true census, for the circle of 30 miles in diameter that forms the area of the Regina count cannot be completely covered in one day by the teams of observers. However, when compared with counts of other years, the numbers are interesting and often significant, sometimes showing quite marked changes in migration patterns. For example, 70 Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers were recorded on May 13, 1967 compared with five on May 15, 1966 and one on May 15, 1965, and this year's

count of 72 Sparrow Hawks was unexpected in view of 10 seen last year and one in 1965. The large numbers of these two species, perhaps the most notable feature of the 1967 census, indicate that the 1967 migration of both species was unusually delayed. It was similarly interesting to find a large flock of migrant Whistling Swans on a slough near Estlin, since swans have usually gone north by this date, and a Snowy Owl seen on the count represents the latest spring record for the Regina area. Also providing evidence of a generally late migration was the small number of flycatchers recorded this year: one Eastern Kingbird, one Western Kingbird, and one Least Flycatcher. The absence of Catbird,