

A COMPARISON OF THE BIRD POPULATIONS OF THE SOUTHERN VANCOUVER ISLAND BIRDWATCHING AREA IN THE 1960s AND THE 2000s

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This document is nothing more than the general qualitative impressions of but a single observer, unbacked by systematic quantitative studies, and should be viewed as such. It has not been reviewed or refereed by others. During the early period, I served as President of the VNHS for three years, and as Editor of the ABR and Chairman of the Bird Records Committee for four years. I was therefore in a position to be fairly well aware of what birds were being seen in the area in those days. In the later period, my birdwatching activities have been much more casual, though I am currently Editor of the new series of ABRs.

In this document I am using such words as *abundant*, *common*, *uncommon*, *rare*, *resident*, *visitor*, *migrant*, etc., in the same limited senses in which they are used in the ABRs, *quo vade*. The document does not discuss rarities.

One thing that has changed is the names used for many of the species, and the sequence in which they are listed. I have tried in this document to stick to the current AOU sequence but, because I have been referring to many old records, I may have lapsed in the sequence from time to time. Sorry about that – but I expect you'll be able to cope.

I dare say some observers will disagree with some of the entries. I'd be glad to hear about this. Since the document is stored in a computer, it would be easy to make changes.

GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE

I don't think there has been any substantial change in its status as a regular spring and fall migrant, with a few seen during the winter.

SNOW GOOSE

No substantial change. Always very much less common than the previous species, and not all observers will have it on their year's list every year.

BRANT

No substantial change. March and April were always the peak months. In the early period, this species was called the Black Brant. The Black Brant was later demoted to being but a race of the Brant – though it could regain its full species status again one day.

CAACKLING GOOSE

Difficult to compare its 1960s status with its 2000s status, because in the 1960s it was regarded as merely a race of the Canada Goose, and separate records were not regularly kept. Its status today

remains uncertain, because observers are reporting "Cackling Geese" without supplying details of their observations. While the species unquestionably occurs here on migration, some recent reports have been demonstrable misidentifications. The status will not become clear until all observers supply details of their sightings.

CANADA GOOSE

It has always been abundant at all seasons, though I am under the impression that it is even more abundant today than in the 1960s, having reached almost plague proportions.

MUTE SWAN

Comparing the 1960s with today is not easy because in the 1960s this species was often regarded as an introduced domestic species which didn't "count" and was not of interest to birdwatchers. The species has been subject to manipulation by "wildlife" (i.e. hunting) interests. During the breeding season it is unquestionably belligerent and intolerant of other species, such as Canada Geese, and has consequently been removed by man from lakes such as Blenkinsop and Elk Lakes, where it formerly bred.

TRUMPETER SWAN

In the early period the perceived view of the Trumpeter Swan was that it had recently been on the verge of extinction and was only just in the process of recovering. In this atmosphere, I think the 1960s attitude was that any unidentified native swans were put down by default as Whistling Swans (the name used in those days for what we now call Tundra Swans), and records of Trumpeter Swans were accepted only when the observer had made a special effort to identify the species. Thus the common native swan was supposed by default to be the Whistling Swan, while a few Trumpeter Swans were identified. I suspect that the Trumpeter Swan then, as now, was actually the common species, and that Whistling Swans were, as today, relatively uncommon. Today, most wild swans are (doubtless correctly) recorded as Trumpeters, and Tundras are found only by the few observers who make the special effort to identify them.

TUNDRA SWAN

See account of Trumpeter Swan.

WOOD DUCK

This has always been a regular breeding bird in summer, though not easy to find because of its secretive habits during the breeding season. What has very much changed, however, is the regular occurrence today of large numbers of Wood Ducks at suburban duck ponds *in winter*, where, far from being the secretive bird that it is in summer, the birds at duck ponds in winter become exceedingly tame, almost to the point of allowing themselves to be touched.

GADWALL

This was a decidedly uncommon winter visitor in the 1960s. There would always be a few sightings, but it was sufficiently uncommon that all individual sightings were recorded. Today it is a common and widespread species in winter, occurring on most large and small bodies of freshwater, and occasionally also on brackish water. There have been undocumented and unconfirmed rumours of breeding, and it will surely not be long before properly documented

breeding records are confirmed. Certainly the species can be found in June, though not many are reported in July.

EURASIAN WIGEON

No noticeable change in status. The larger herds of wigeon usually included, as today, one or two Eurasians. In the early period, the spelling was widgeon, and it is interesting that even today my computer flags "wigeon" as a spelling mistake, but accepts "widgeon". Let's keep the d out. We don't need one for pigeon, so we shouldn't need it for wigeon either.

AMERICAN WIGEON

No change. In the 1960s, as today, this was always one of the commonest nonpasserine birds in the area. As today an occasional wigeon would remain during the summer, but I am not aware of any breeding records.

MALLARD

Hugely abundant then; hugely abundant today.

BLUE-WINGED TEAL

No obvious change in status from being an uncommon-to-common breeding summer visitor.

CINNAMON TEAL

In the 1960s this was an uncommon breeding summer visitor; not so common as the Blue-winged Teal. Today few reports of this species reach me. I suspect, however, that there has been no real change in its status, and that it is much under-reported.

NORTHERN SHOVELLER

No obvious change in status. It is and was a common winter visitor. There have been a few breeding records (I remember that a pair successfully reared young at McIntyre reservoir once) and I expect that breeding may be proved again. I prefer the spelling with two ls, although I note that even the British are succumbing to the American influence and are using the American spelling these days.

NORTHERN PINTAIL

No obvious change in status. It is and was a common winter visitor. I believe there have been the occasional breeding record, but I can't remember any specific details. We should keep a look out for summer records.

GREEN-WINGED TEAL

No obvious change in status. It is and was a common winter visitor. In the early period the *crecca* race was regarded as a full species, known as the Common Teal, though here it was (as now) anything but common. Reports of the Common Teal were subject to intense scrutiny and few were accepted. Reports of what is now called the "Eurasian" Green-winged Teal are now more numerous and are not subject to quite the same scrutiny as they were when they was a full species.

CANVASBACK

No obvious change in status. It is and was a common-to-uncommon winter visitor.

REDHEAD

No obvious change in status. It is and was on the borderline between "uncommon" and "rare". Certainly not a species that all observers will see every year.

RING-NECKED DUCK

No obvious change in status. It is and was a common winter visitor.

GREATER SCAUP**LESSER SCAUP**

The status of these species has changed dramatically. In the 1960s, sewage was dumped straight into the sea at Clover Point, which was one of the best birding locations in the country. There would always be huge flocks of scaup there every winter. The Lesser Scaup would generally be the more numerous of the two species before the New Year. By January they would be joined by more and more Greater Scaup. I can't remember the date when they moved the sewage outlet farther out to sea, but from that date the scaup vanished, and Clover Point ceased to become a special birdwatching area. Of course both scaup are still common here (and occasional individuals of either species may still be seen in the summer), but only the older birdwatchers will remember the huge numbers at Clover Point during the winter.

HARLEQUIN DUCK

No obvious change in status.

SURF SCOTER

No obvious change in status.

WHITE-WINGED SCOTER

No obvious change in status.

BLACK SCOTER

No obvious change in status. It is and was a rather uncommon winter visitor, usually seen only in cold winters and in certain locations such as Island View Beach, Pat Bay and off Whiffen Spit. It has also been subject to misidentification, White-winged Scoters occasionally being mistaken for Black Scoters. In the early period, the species, though our least numerous scoter, was called the Common Scoter.

LONG-TAILED DUCK

No obvious change in status. It was formerly called the Oldsquaw, a name that has subsequently fallen to the trend towards political correctness. The name Long-tailed Duck was always the name used in the UK.

BUFFLEHEAD

I believe that, for a long time, this has been a species whose numbers have changed the least from year to year, its winter population being remarkably constant.

COMMON GOLDENEYE

No obvious change in status. It is and was a common winter visitor.

BARROW'S GOLDENEYE

No obvious change in status. It is and was a common winter visitor. Often regarded as less common than the Common Goldeneye, I am not sure how marked the difference would be if we were to census the two species over the entire southern Vancouver Island birdwatching area.

HOODED MERGANSER

No obvious change in status. It is and was a common breeding resident.

COMMON MERGANSER

No obvious change in status. It is and was a common breeding resident and a very common winter visitor. There always was a huge wintering flock on Elk Lake.

RED-BREASTED MERGANSER

No obvious change in status. It is and was a common winter visitor. Then, as now, there would be reports of juvenile birds as evidence of local breeding. Then, as now, all such reports were firmly (and correctly) rejected by those responsible for keeping records.

RUDDY DUCK

It has always needed cold weather to find this bird. I fancy it may have been slightly more common in the early period – or perhaps I'm not so good as spotting them as in my youth.

RING-NECKED PHEASANT

Where have all the pheasants gone? In the period 1966-1972, Rory Finegan did annual pheasant crowing counts at 30 locations in the Saanich Peninsula, and saw, or heard, the total crows increase from 87 in 1966 to 246 in 1973. It would be interesting for someone to repeat Rory's survey today. My guess is that you'd be hard put to find 20 birds.

SOOTY GROUSE

Where have all the grouse gone? In the 1960s this species was called the Blue Grouse. It was common and widespread. You'd be guaranteed to hear it hooting in the Munn Road area in the spring. It bred on Mount Douglas. At the Dominion Astrophysical Observatory, we used to sit on the front steps of the main office building at lunchtime and Blue Grouse would come and take potato crisps out of our hands. One morning, while sleeping in the ground-floor dormitory after a night's observing, I was woken up by hooting, and there, just a few *feet* in front of my pillow was a Blue Grouse in full nuptial display, continuing for an hour. Today they have disappeared from suburban areas and they are to be found only by those who don hiking boots and visit the rougher outlying hills.

RUFFED GROUSE

Where have all the grouse gone? This was always a scarcer bird than the Blue Grouse, but you could usually get it on your year's list. The exact status was difficult to ascertain, because brief glimpses of birds seen (but not heard) deep in the forest were subject to identity uncertainty. Now it's a major event if you either hear or see the bird anywhere.

CALIFORNIA QUAIL

No obvious change in status. It is and was a common breeding resident.

MOUNTAIN QUAIL

It was very rare in the 1960s, and we have almost certainly lost it since then. But some small hope lingers on. Just three years ago I was close to (but not quite reaching) certainty that I heard Mountain Quail at a former locality. Unfortunately since then the area has been subject to major disturbance, so, even if Mountain Quail were there then, they are probably no longer there. I think we have lost this one.

GREY PARTRIDGE

For an account of the history of this species in the area, see an article by Ray Beckett in the *Victoria Naturalist*, **28**, 34 (1971). The last Grey Partridge seen in the area were four seen by Dave Stirling just outside the main terminal of Victoria International Airport on Boxing Day, 1971. I don't believe the species has been seen here since.

RED-THROATED LOON

No change in status. The least common of the three regular loons.

PACIFIC LOON

In the 1960s, this bird was reported under the name Arctic Loon. Today the Pacific and Arctic Loons are regarded as separate species. I think this bird is maybe not quite so common now as in the 1960s. We used to get huge rafts of thousands of these loons in Active Pass. I haven't heard of such large numbers recently.

COMMON LOON

This species bred in the area in the 1960s. I don't know that there are recent breeding records.

PIED-BILLED GREBE

No change. A common breeding resident.

HORNED GREBE

The population of this grebe has drastically declined. While it is still not uncommon in winter, the modern birdwatcher can have little idea how abundant and widespread it was around the entire coastline of the area in the 1960s. Today it isn't seen in anything like the numbers that were usual in the 1960s

EARED GREBE

In the 1960s this bird was not nearly as common as the Horned Grebe, yet it was still thought of as a reasonably common bird. Today it is tough to get it on your year's list. This grebe has greatly declined.

WESTERN GREBE

Like the Horned Grebe, this species has drastically declined – perhaps even more so. Counts of 1000 or more were frequently made at the main concentrations at Royal Roads, Active Pass, Pat

Bay, Saanich Inlet and the Duncan area, and it was regularly seen around the coast apart from these particular concentrations. Observers who believe the bird is common today have no idea how abundant and widespread it was in the 1960s, when it was not only a common winter visitor, but moderate numbers (of nonbreeding birds) could be seen throughout the year. Today it is only a winter visitor, and it is probably missing from the year's lists of many observers.

In the 1960s the name "Western Grebe" included the Clark's Grebe, which is now considered to be a separate species. No one distinguished between the two in the 1960s. Today, a few "Clark's Grebes" are reported each winter, but in all cases so far without convincing details or satisfactory (or any) documentation.

Procellariids

Then, as now, all were rarely seen by the land-based observer. However, hundreds of Sooty Shearwaters were seen from shore in September 1971 and again in 1972. I don't think such large numbers have been seen from shore in recent years.

CORMORANTS

As far as my own impressions go, there doesn't seem to have been much change in the status of any of our three cormorants between the 1960s and the 2000s. However, the Pelagic Cormorant used to breed at Gordon Head. I am not sure whether it still does so. Also I don't know if we still get reports of huge concentrations of Brandt's Cormorants from Active Pass in fall and winter.

GREAT BLUE HERON

I don't have any detailed quantitative information about the several heronries in the area, and how breeding success in the 1960s compares with breeding success now. This year, as is well known, breeding success at the large heronry in Beacon Hill Park was very low, owing to predation by one or more Bald Eagles. However, this has always been a danger for herons, and, as far as general sightings by birdwatchers away from the principal heronries go, the Great Blue Heron still seems to be as common and familiar a species as it was in the 1960s.

GREEN HERON

This was a rare bird, particularly in the Victoria area (more often seen in Duncan) in the 1960s. Today, while still uncommon, it is regular, and breeds. It is a much more familiar bird today than in the earlier period.

TURKEY VULTURE

This species seems to have increased greatly. It was always common on migration, and a few summered in the north of the area, though winter sightings, while not unknown, were rare. Today it is seen in large numbers throughout the area during spring, summer and fall, and winter records, while still few, are now regular. Rocky Point was not birded as much in the 1960s as it is today, so the huge kettles of hundreds of vultures seen there today were not known in the 1960s. Nevertheless, although part of the increase may be apparent owing to the establishment of the RPBO, I think there has been a huge real increase in our vulture population.

OSPREY

No obvious change in status.

BALD EAGLE

No obvious change in status.

NORTHERN HARRIER

No obvious change in status. In the 1960s this species was called the Marsh Hawk. The British call it the Hen Harrier (not the Marsh Harrier, which is a different species.)

SHARP-SHINNED HAWK

The status of this species is difficult to determine because then, as now, observers were always reluctant to indicate how they identified accipiters that they believed to have been of this species. It is certain that observers frequently confused – and still do confuse - the three species of accipiter, and, while they continue to fail to supply details, it will not be possible to understand fully the status of the Sharp-shinned Hawk. Within these limitations, it is believed that the Sharp-shinned Hawk is a passage migrant and winter visitor, and there is no obvious change in its status between the 1960s and the 2000s.

COOPER'S HAWK

No obvious change in its status as a common breeding resident.

GOSHAWK

This species was usually reported several times a year in the 1960s, as it is today; but, how many of such reports, *if any*, refer to real Goshawks is impossible to ascertain. The difficulties are:

- Nearly all reported "Goshawks", both then and now, have been reported without adequate details, or in most cases, without any details at all.
- Among such reports received are some which, upon investigation, have been shown definitively to have been erroneous. Some of the circumstances in which misidentifications have been made boggle the imagination – yet such misidentifications are a reality of life for those charged with keeping accurate records of bird occurrences. It is probable that *most* reports of "Goshawks" are in fact misidentifications.
- Among those that really are Goshawks, some may be, and indeed some probably are, falconers' birds.
- As long as observers continue to report observations of Goshawks without supplying any details of their sightings, there is no way in which a Recorder can distinguish between genuine sightings, misidentifications, and falconers' birds. Consequently *all* reports of Goshawks without documentation are questionable, and it is not possible to determine the status of the species, let alone any change in its status over time.

That said, and in spite of the difficulties, a few (a very few) Goshawk reports probably do relate to genuine Goshawks, and there are recent certain breeding records within the southern Vancouver Island birdwatching area. At present, the bird is probably best regarded as a rare resident.

BROAD-WINGED HAWK

This species was entirely unknown from the area in the 1960s. Nowadays it is reported quite regularly in surprisingly large numbers. However, the Editor has not received a single report of a sighting of a Broad-winged Hawk with any documentation whatever, even as to the name of the supposed observer. Consequently the Editor is unable to say anything about the status of this bird, or to supply any evidence of its actual occurrence in the area.

SWAINSON'S HAWK

The status of this bird seems to be unchanged since the 1960s. That is to say there were and there are a few reports of this species, some of which are adequately documented and leave no doubt about the correct identification, while most sightings are reported with no documentation and therefore leave room for question.

RED-TAILED HAWK

No obvious change in the status of this common breeding resident.

GOLDEN EAGLE

This species was reported with some regularity in the 1960s and is similarly reported today. Nearly all reports are unsupported with any detail. It is known that some reports are misidentifications, and it is probable that *most* reports are misidentifications. While it is probable that some Golden Eagles occur in the area, this cannot be determined from unsupported assertions of sightings, and consequently the status of this bird remains, as in the 1960s, unknown.

AMERICAN KESTREL

In the early 1960s this species was called the Sparrow Hawk. I am under the impression that it was rather commoner in the 1960s than now. It was regularly seen throughout the year. I may be mistaken, but to my memory it bred regularly, for example at Rithet's Bog, and even at the site of what is now the University of Victoria. Today it is known mainly as a passage migrant and uncommon winter visitor.

MERLIN

In the early 1960s this species was called the Pigeon Hawk. Status probably unchanged. Then, as now, the species was typically seen in most months except, apparently May and June, when it was, and is, sometimes missed. There are no breeding records that I am aware of from the 1960s. In the last couple of years now there has been quite convincing evidence (if not definitive proof) of breeding in the area.

PEREGRINE FALCON

No obvious change in status as an uncommon but regular breeding resident, passage migrant and winter visitor. The activities of falconers have always raised questions about the provenance of some birds.

GYRFALCON

The remarks under Goshawk apply equally to this rare species. It is often reported, nearly always without documentation. Some sightings are known certainly to have been misidentifications, and it is probable that most reported sightings are such. The usual cause for misidentification is a poor

sighting of a Peregrine Falcon in which the observer fails to see the moustachial mark, or a young Peregrine with a poorly-developed moustachial mark. However, other non-falcon birds that have been reported erroneously as Gyrfalcons have included Red-tailed Hawk and Glaucous-winged Gull. Accordingly little is known reliably about the status of this species, even as to the colour phases reported, and this situation will continue while observers fail to supply details of their sightings. Nevertheless there are probably a few genuine occurrences of Gyrfalcons here in cold weather.

VIRGINIA RAIL

No obvious change in status, in spite of pressure on its habitat. As today, Rithet's Bog and Quick's Bottom were always regular places to find the Virginia Rail, and it bred then as now at both places.

SORA

No obvious change in status, in spite of pressure on its habitat. As today, Rithet's Bog and Quick's Bottom were always regular places to find the Sora, and it bred then as now at both places. Unlike the resident Virginia Rail, the Sora is a summer visitor only, although there have been records as late as November.

AMERICAN COOT

No obvious change in status. There has always been the large winter flock at Elk Lake. Usually, both then and now, young birds (not chicks) have been seen towards the end of the summer. I am not sure whether there were, in the 1960s, or are now in the 2000s, proven breeding records.

SANDHILL CRANE

No obvious change in status.

BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER

No obvious change in status.

AMERICAN AND PACIFIC GOLDEN-PLOVERS

In the 1960s these were a single species, the American Golden Plover – and it didn't have that wretched and ungrammatical hyphen in those days. No obvious change in status as uncommon passage migrants. The correct determination of the relative status of the two modern species is going to require many of us to hone our identification skills over the next few years. At present some observers are "identifying" the species without supplying details. Others merely say "Golden-Plover sp", which is a good deal more valuable than, and preferable to, pretending to identify a bird that was not seen or described adequately.

SEMIPALMATED PLOVER

No obvious change in status.

KILLDEER

No obvious change in status, although "Davy" Davidson always used to insist that it was not nearly as common as in his early days.

BLACK OYSTERCATCHER

No obvious change in status.

GREATER YELLOWLEGS

No obvious change in status.

LESSER YELLOWLEGS

No obvious change in status.

SOLITARY SANDPIPER

Sightings of this species seem to be a little more regular and frequent than in the old days. Whether this is a result of more sandpipers or of our increasing skill at finding and identifying them is open to debate.

WANDERING TATTLER

No obvious change in status, except that it seems to have changed its former favorite spot from McMicking Point in the 1960s to Ogden Point now.

SPOTTED SANDPIPER

No obvious change in status as a common breeding summer visitor and uncommon resident.

WHIMBREL

In the 1960s this would be seen in small numbers during the spring and fall migration, and perhaps the occasional bird in winter. The large flocks of two or three dozen on the Victoria Golf course in the spring are a modern phenomenon.

MARbled GODWIT

This was a rare bird in the 1960s, and the few sightings were often disbelieved by the authorities of the day. It is now much commoner, and a regular migrant in small numbers.

BLACK TURNSTONE

Although still numerous, I believe its numbers were larger in the 1960s than today.

RUDDY TURNSTONE

The 1970-1972 ABRs list this as a "common" passage migrant, and indicate numbers a little larger than we typically see today.

SURFBIRD

No obvious change in its status. It always was, as now, common but not so numerous as the Black Turnstone.

SANDERLING

No obvious change in its status.

SEMIPALMATED SANDPIPER

No change in its status; that is, controversial. Then, as now, some observers felt that the bird cannot be reliably identified except under most favourable circumstances and that most reports are probably unreliable; while others saw and recognized the species regularly and felt no need to justify their sightings with field notes or other details. Nevertheless in both periods one or two careful and meticulous observers have recorded detailed field notes to show that the species probably does occur, but rarely. The precise status of this species will remain uncertain as long as the majority of observers who report this species fail to supply details of their sightings.

WESTERN SANDPIPER

No obvious change in its status.

LEAST SANDPIPER

No obvious change in its status.

BAIRD'S SANDPIPER

No obvious change in its status.

PECTORAL SANDPIPER

Although I cannot quantify it, I am under the impression that the bird was slightly more numerous in the early period than it is today.

ROCK SANDPIPER

Although I cannot quantify it, I am under the impression that the bird was slightly more numerous in the early period than it is today.

DUNLIN

No obvious change in its status.

DOWITCHERS

In the early 1960s only the Short-billed Dowitcher was recognized in the area, but by 1970 it was firmly established that both species occur in our area. Today the world is divided into those who believe the two species are not safely separable except under the most favourable circumstances, and those who believe they can unerringly identify them and see no need to justify their observations to those whom they regard as less able. While this situation continues, the relative status of these two species will remain unknown.

WILSON'S SNIPE

In the early 1960s this species was called Wilson's Snipe, but by the late 1960s it had become Common Snipe. Recent AOU opinion is that Wilson's Snipe and Common Snipe are two separate species. It is assumed that the bird we see here is Wilson's Snipe, though field separation of the two species is probably an art that most birders have yet to develop. Breeding in the area was often suspected but rarely proved, though it was highly probable in the 1960s in such places as Cobble Meadow, Duncan and Pender Island. We do not seem to hear of breeding records today, and we may have lost this species as a breeding bird.

WILSON'S PHALAROPE

No obvious change in its status – i.e. rare, but it occasionally occurs

RED-NECKED PHALAROPE

In the 1960s this was called the Northern Phalarope. We have now adopted the British name of Red-necked Phalarope. We can still occasionally see fairly large numbers of this phalarope, but it seems to me that we no longer get regular reports of thousands of these birds offshore.

RED PHALAROPE

This was a rare bird in the 1960s. It is still much less common than the Red-necked Phalarope, but I think it is being seen, or recognized, more regularly than previously. The British call it the Grey Phalarope.

PARASITIC JAEGER

We have all but lost this bird. It used to accompany regularly the large numbers of Common Terns that were here every fall. Now the terns are rare, and so is the jaeger.

FRANKLIN'S GULL

This gull used to be a regular fall migrant in moderate numbers, and could be watched with Boney's catching termites every year. It is much scarcer today, and probably many a birder doesn't get it on his or her year's list.

BONAPARTE'S GULL

I am convinced that this gull is not nearly as abundant as it used to be. However, it congregates in flocks, so that some observers see many while some see few, so I may be wrong about this. Nevertheless I do believe it was formerly more abundant than now.

HEERMANN'S GULL

No obvious change in its status.

MEW GULL

No obvious change in its status.

RING-BILLED GULL

No obvious change in its status. That is, a few do occur every year, though some undocumented reports are and were probable misidentifications. The very large numbers reported in 2007 in the Cowichan area are probably unprecedented; nevertheless the species has always been much more numerous there than in Victoria.

CALIFORNIA GULL

No obvious change in its status.

HERRING GULL**THAYER'S GULL**

In the 1960s these were regarded as a single species, and few observers separated them. I don't think there is any obvious change in the status of either species.

WESTERN GULL

No obvious change in its status – and this includes the still-present difficulties in identification and possible hybridization.

GLAUCOUS WINGED GULL

No obvious change in its status.

CASPIAN TERN

This was a rare bird indeed in the 1960s. It was certainly not seen every year, but by 1972 its status was promoted from "vagrant" to merely "rare". Now it is a common summer visitor, and breeding has been proved.

COMMON TERN**ARCTIC TERN**

"Commic" Terns were very common fall migrants, being regularly seen in the hundreds. Most were believed to be Common Terns, though Arctic Terns were also reported, probably correctly in some cases and incorrectly in others. Now the birds are rarely seen. This has been one of the most obvious and astonishing changes in the Victoria bird scene.

COMMON MURRE

While still common, we don't seem to get the rafts of thousands of these birds that were seen in the 1960s.

PIGEON GUILLEMOT

No obvious change in its status.

MARbled MURRELET

The numbers of this species that we see today are far, far fewer than were commonly seen in the 1960s. There has been a drastic decline in its numbers.

ANCIENT MURRELET

No obvious change in its status.

CASSIN'S AUKLET

No obvious change in its status, which is that it is and was a rare winter visitor and that many reports are undocumented and unreliable.

RHINOCEROS AUKLET

In our area this bird has increased in numbers since the 1960s, when it was described as "uncommon".

TUFTED PUFFIN

I would say that this species has changed from "uncommon" to "rare". It used to breed on Mandarte Island. Does it still do so?

ROCK PIGEON

No obvious change in its status. In the 1960s this bird was called the "Rock Dove", and it was often "not counted" by birdwatchers.

BAND-TAILED PIGEON

There has been a severe and drastic decline in this species. While flocks are still to be seen in the East Sooke area, its occurrence today is very local, and the modern observer may not appreciate how widespread and common a breeding bird this was in the 1960s.

MOURNING DOVE

No obvious change in its status..

BARN OWL

Always a rare and hard-to-find resident, I think it might be slightly rarer today than in the 1960s.

WESTERN SCREEECH OWL

There has been a severe and drastic decline in this species. In the 1960s you could go out at night into almost any woodland, and by imitation or use of a tape-recorder you could almost guarantee to call one up. Many attribute its decline to the arrival of the Barred Owl, but it is not certain how many observers have actually seen a Barred Owl eating a Screech-Owl. In my experience the Screech-Owl was a very nocturnal species, whereas the Barred Owl is largely diurnal and hunts and fishes in wet areas. However, whether or not it was cause-and-effect, the decline of the Screech-Owl was coincident in time with the increase of the Barred Owl.

GREAT HORNED OWL

No obvious change in its status.

NORTHERN PYGMY-OWL

No obvious change in its status.

SNOWY OWL

No obvious change in its status.

BARRED OWL

There were no Barred Owls in the 1960s. I can't remember in which year a Barred Owl was first seen, but it caused a sensation at the time. Today it is probably our commonest and (because of its diurnal habits) most-seen owl.

SHORT-EARED OWL

I think that reports of this migratory owl are less frequent today than they were in the 1960s.

NORTHERN SAW-WHET OWL

In the 1960s, most reports of this owl were of dead or injured juveniles found on the road. It has always been very difficult to find. As far as the ordinary birdwatcher is concerned, it is as rare now as it was then. However, the large numbers of birds caught and banded at the RPBO in recent years is one of the most spectacular bird stories of this decade. One might guess that there always had been a nocturnal migration in that area, but that it was undetected before the foundation of the RPBO.

COMMON NIGHTHAWK

Those who are fortunate enough to see the occasional flock of Nighthawks on migration today may not appreciate what a drastic decline there has been in this species. In the 1960s it could be seen everywhere in the summer, and bred regularly in the area. There has been a huge loss of this species.

BLACK SWIFT

Always uncommon, I think it is less common today than in the 1960s.

VAUX'S SWIFT

No obvious change in its status – though I'm not sure if it still breeds in the chimneys at Butchart Gardens.

ANNA'S HUMMINGBIRD

This bird was unknown in the 1960s. One was tentatively identified in 1970, and one was identified with certainty in 1971. However, it probably did occur, but unnoticed, in the 1960s, and CBC records in December of "Rufous Hummingbirds" were almost certainly this species. Now, of course, the Anna's Hummingbird is common and ubiquitous.

RUFOUS HUMMINGBIRD

I believe this species is very much less common than in the 1960s. Whether the arrival of the Anna's Hummingbird and the decline of the Rufous Hummingbird is cause-and-effect is open to speculation. Today, the Rufous is uncommon in urban and suburban areas, but is still common in the surrounding hills where the Anna's is less evident.

BELTED KINGFISHER

No obvious change in its status.

LEWIS'S WOODPECKER

I am told that this woodpecker used to be regular in the 1950s, but by the 1960s it had vanished.

RED-BREASTED SAPSUCKER

In the 1960s, this and the Yellow-bellied and Red-naped Sapsuckers were all regarded as one species. There is no obvious change in the status of the Red-breasted Sapsucker. Most reports of the other two species are undocumented and unreliable.

DOWNY WOODPECKER

No obvious change in its status.

HAIRY WOODPECKER

No obvious change in its status.

NORTHERN FLICKER

In the 1960s, the Red-shafted and Yellow-shafted Flickers were different species, and records of the Yellow-shafted Flicker were usually carefully documented. Because they are now mere subspecies, many modern birdwatchers do not record them separately. Many of the "Yellow-shafted" flickers seen locally actually show intermediate characters, and it would be of interest to record these. Otherwise there has been no obvious change in its status.

PILEATED WOODPECKER

No obvious change in its status.

OLIVE-SIDED FLYCATCHER

No obvious change in its status.

WESTERN WOOD-PEWEE

No obvious change in its status.

Empidonax

The birds in this genus have a reputation of being impossible to identify in the field. Some observers feel that this reputation is well deserved. Others feel that it is greatly exaggerated and that the experienced observer can usually separate them by taking a little trouble. In between is the poor wretch who has the responsibility of keeping records. It is true that while birds are singing and in their preferred habitat, identifying the common and familiar species is not difficult for an experienced observer. The situation is more difficult when the bird is seen in migration outside its preferred habitat and is not singing, and it becomes even more difficult when an observer reports a rare species other than our three regular *Empidonaces*. The recorder or editor often has to make a choice between reliability and completeness of the records that he publishes. For any responsible editor, there really is no choice – he can publish only records that are demonstrably reliable, even if this means rejecting some reports, and even if the identification may have been correct. Of course, if the observer reports a rare and hard-to-identify species with no details such as field notes, there is no difficulty for the editor – the record is rejected.

I believe there has been no obvious change between the 1960s and 2000s in the status of **WILLOW FLYCATCHER and PACIFIC-SLOPE FLYCATCHER**. In the 1960s these two species were called Traill's Flycatcher and Western Flycatcher. In the early 1960s, these were the only two *Empidonaces* that were recognized. It was only in the late 1960s that observers began to recognize and accept reports of **HAMMOND'S FLYCATCHER**, which we now know to be a common summer visitor. Although few were reported and fewer accepted in the 1960s, I don't believe there has been any real change in the status of this species. It was not reported often in the 1960s mainly because of the reputation of difficulty in identifying *Empidonax*, and also perhaps because this species prefers habitats in the outlying hills that are not so often visited by all birdwatchers.

Since this document does not deal with rarities, there is no need for me to comment at length on other species, such as Least and Dusky Flycatcher that are reported from time to time. Some of these reports have not been accompanied with any details and are therefore worthless; some observers have, however, carefully reported on the identification features seen. There are banding records of the Dusky Flycatcher from RPBO, so we do know that the species does occur here.

EASTERN KINGBIRD

WESTERN KINGBIRD

No obvious change in the status of either of these birds, both of which have always been uncommon migrants. The only possible change is that, as I remember from the early 1960s, there were more reports of Eastern Kingbird than Western Kingbird, though this was changing later in the decade. Today the Western seems to be more frequent, though there still are sightings of Eastern Kingbirds.

NORTHERN SHRIKE

No obvious change in its status.

CASSIN'S VIREO

This was called the Solitary Vireo in the 1960s. I would say there has been little change in its status. If anything, it may have been slightly commoner in the 1960s than now.

HUTTON'S VIREO

No obvious change in its status.

WARBLING VIREO

No obvious change in its status.

RED-EYED VIREO

Always uncommon to rare. In the Victoria area, reliable spots to find the bird (in June, but not much before) used to be University of Victoria, Lochside Park, Metchosin (Witty's) Lagoon. The birds have long gone from UVic. Are they still at the other two locations? Are they commoner in the north of our area than in Victoria? I didn't check this year, but they could usually be found north of Cowichan Station.

STELLER'S JAY

No obvious change in its status.

NORTHWESTERN CROW

No obvious change in its status.

COMMON RAVEN

No obvious change in its status.

SKYLARK

It would probably not be grossly inaccurate to say that in the 1960s the population was more than a thousand, and today it is less than a hundred. You can quibble over the exact figures, but that gives the general idea.

HORNED LARK

I am not certain, but I believe in the early 1960s there were a few nesting records. They don't nest here today. Apart from that, there has been no obvious change in its status.

PURPLE MARTIN

I am not sure if everyone will agree, but I think there has been no obvious change in its status.

TREE SWALLOW

Perhaps very slightly commoner today than in the 1960s, but probably not much in it.

VIOLET-GREEN SWALLOW

No obvious change in its status.

BANK SWALLOW

No obvious change in its status as an uncommon to rare migrant. Contrary to concerns that I may have recently voiced, a few observers in the 1960s, as today, *have* supplied convincing field notes of this species. If all observers were to supply details of their sightings it would be much easier to assess the status of the Bank Swallow. In the absence of field notes it is not possible to avoid the suspicion that a few of the reports of the Bank Swallows are erroneous.

NORTHERN ROUGH-WINGED SWALLOW

No obvious change in its status.

CLIFF SWALLOW

Much less abundant than formerly. In the 1960s there was a large nesting colony on the MacPherson Building at UVic, and it was generally a common swallow. While some are doubtless overlooked today, there is little doubt that it has greatly declined since the 1960s.

BARN SWALLOW

It has always been abundant. I am under the impression that it is even more so now than in the 1960s. Apparently not all observers agree.

CHESTNUT-BACKED CHICKADEE

No obvious change in its status.

BUSHTIT

No obvious change in its status since the late 1960s. However, if we go back before the 1960s, I believe this was not at all a common bird, though I don't know the early history of the species in our area.

RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH

No obvious change in its status.

BROWN CREEPER

No obvious change in its status.

BEWICK'S WREN

No obvious change in its status.

HOUSE WREN

No obvious change in its status.

WINTER WREN

No obvious change in its status.

MARSH WREN

I believe it is significantly commoner now than in the 1960. In the Duncan area it was common enough in the Duncan area, but much less often seen near Victoria, and apparently in the Victoria area it was known primarily as an uncommon winter visitor. Today it is a common breeding resident. In the 1960s, this bird was known as the Long-billed Marsh Wren.

AMERICAN DIPPER

No obvious change in its status, though we don't get many reports these days since we have to pay to see it at its main haunts, which are the Goldstream and Sooke Rivers.

GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET

In the 1960s it was a common breeding resident. I rarely hear it in the summer now. This means either that it is now scarce as a breeding resident, or that the high-frequency sensitivity of my ears is less than it was forty years ago. Perhaps a younger observer can clarify the status of this species as a breeding resident.

RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET

No obvious change in its status.

WESTERN BLUEBIRD

In the early 1960s this was regarded as a not uncommon bird. As well as being a regular passage migrant, a few bred regularly in the area, and a few could usually be found during the winter. By the late 1960s it was still a passage migrant, it still bred, and there were still a few winter sightings – but it was becoming sufficiently uncommon that observers were starting to take note of individual occurrences. Today we have lost the bird entirely as a breeder; it is now a rare passage migrant at best, and not recorded every year.

MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD

Any sighting of a Mountain Bluebird in the 1960s would cause a sensation. It was a great rarity. According to the 1970 ABR, one seen in that year was only the fourth for the area. Now, while uncommon, several seem to be seen on migration every year, and it is no longer a major rarity.

TOWNSEND'S SOLITAIRE

No obvious change in its status.

SWAINSON'S THRUSH

No obvious change in its status.

HERMIT THRUSH

No obvious change in its status. Perhaps one day proof may be found of its breeding within the confines of our area. It can sometimes, for example, be heard singing in summer above Sandcut Beach, which is not far outside the area. Until then, its status is that of a common winter visitor.

AMERICAN ROBIN

No obvious change in its status.

VARIED THRUSH

No obvious change in its status.

STARLING

This bird is still abundant, and there are still large flocks to be seen. But I seem to remember absolutely gigantic flocks in the 1960s. So large were these flocks that one could watch them at length in awe as being one of Nature's great spectacles. I don't think we get quite these numbers today.

AMERICAN PIPIT

No obvious change in its status. It was called Water Pipit in the 1960s.

CEDAR WAXWING

No obvious change in its status.

ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER

No obvious change in its status.

YELLOW WARBLER

No obvious change in its status.

YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER

In the 1960s the "Audubon's Warbler" and "Myrtle Warbler" were regarded as distinct species and were recorded separately. With some exceptions (e.g. RPBO) few observers today take separate note of the white- and yellow-throated forms. The yellow-throated form ("Audubon's") was always the commoner of the two.

BLACK-THROATED GREY WARBLER

In the 1960s it was known mainly as a passage migrant in the Victoria area, although there were more frequent summer records in the Duncan area. Today we know that some are present in the Victoria and Duncan areas during the summer, and regular breeding can probably be assumed, though I don't know how much direct and positive proof there is of this. (E.g has anyone found a

nest or seen young birds being fed?) I think there has probably been no real change in its status, though there are more sightings these days than formerly because we know where to look (e.g. Munn Road, Gowlland-Tod Park, Horth Hill, etc).

TOWNSEND'S WARBLER

No obvious change in its status.

MACGILLIVRAY'S WARBLER

No obvious change in its status – though most reports these days are of birds migrating through the Victoria area in spring and fall. We need more summer observations over the Malahat and in the Spectacle Lake area to be sure that Macgillivray's Warbler is still there in its former numbers. There has been a great deal of disturbance in recent years in some of its breeding areas, and it would be nice to know a little more about the present breeding status of it.

COMMON YELLOWTHROAT

No obvious change in its status.

WILSON'S WARBLER

No obvious change in its status.

WESTERN TANAGER

No obvious change in its status.

SPOTTED TOWHEE

Known in the 1960s as the Rufous-sided Towhee. No obvious change in its status.

CHIPPING SPARROW

No obvious change in its status.

VESPER SPARROW

This is one that we have lost. It was always regarded as a very rare bird in our area, but in fact a few used to breed at Cobble Hill. No longer – the habitat has been destroyed. Cassidy, where it may still occur, is of course outside our area.

SAVANNAH SPARROW

The only change in status that I have noticed is that there seem to be more wintering birds today than in the 1960s. A few could always be found in the winter, but it seems to me that rather more are being found in winter today.

FOX SPARROW

The only slight change in status that I have noticed is that in the 1960s one rarely heard the song of this species within the area. Maybe it is staying with us just a little longer in the spring today, because its song is now one of the familiar sounds of spring. I don't think breeding has ever been proved inside the boundaries of our area; that will surely come? Maybe?

LINCOLN'S SPARROW

In the 1960s this bird was known almost exclusively as a passage migrant. It was rare (though not completely unknown) to detect the bird in winter. Today it is still uncommon in winter, but it can usually be found.

SWAMP SPARROW

I don't think we had this bird at all in the 1960s. I may be wrong, but I believe I found the first Swamp Sparrow sometime in the 1970s. Today it is regularly reported with careless abandon, as if it were nothing remarkable. Because nearly all reports are unaccompanied by any details such as field notes, it cannot be ascertained how many of them, if any, actually are Swamp Sparrows. Its present status will remain unknown as long as observers fail to supply details of their observations.

WHITE-THROATED SPARROW

No obvious change in its status.

HARRIS'S SPARROW

No obvious change in its status.

WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW

No obvious change in its status.

GOLDEN-CROWNED SPARROW

No obvious change in its status.

DARK-EYED JUNCO

No obvious change in its status. In the 1960s, the "Oregon" and "Slate-coloured" Juncos were regarded as separate species, and the occasional "Slate-coloured" Junco would be carefully recorded. Today probably not so much notice is taken of it. Unlike the "Yellow-Shafted" Flicker, many of which here show intermediate characters, the occasional "Slate-coloured" Junco reported appears to be fairly pure-blooded, with little sign of intermediate characters.

LAPLAND LONGSPUR

No obvious change in its status.

SNOW BUNTING

No obvious change in its status.

BLACK-HEADED GROSBEAK

No obvious change in its status, though it may be slightly more common today. We had a Rose-breasted Grosbeak in 1972.

RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD

No obvious change in its status.

WESTERN MEADOWLARK

In the early 1960s this bird was regarded as a common breeding resident. However, by the late 1960s concern was being expressed about its breeding status. Today, as far as I know it no longer breeds here, though it remains a fairly common passage migrant and winter visitor.

BREWERS' BLACKBIRD

No obvious change in its status.

BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD

No obvious change in its status.

PURPLE FINCH

No obvious change in its status.

HOUSE FINCH

No obvious change in its status.

RED CROSSBILL

No obvious change in its status.

PINE SISKIN

Owing to the irruptive nature of this species, and large change in numbers from one year to the next, it is difficult to ascertain long-term trends. However, it certainly used to breed regularly in the area in the 1960s. I am not sure if it still does.

AMERICAN GOLDFINCH

No obvious change in its status.

EVENING GROSBEAK

No obvious change in its status.

HOUSE SPARROW

No obvious change in its status, unless, perhaps, it is becoming a little more abundant than before.

SUMMARY OF SOME MAJOR CHANGES

This brief summary lists those birds for which there have been obvious, large and major changes in population. It does not include minor or unclear changes in status.

Large increase

Gadwall
Turkey Vulture
Marbled Godwit
Caspian Tern

Large decrease

Greater Scaup
Lesser Scaup
Ring-necked Pheasant
Sooty Grouse

Barred Owl
Anna's Hummingbird

Ruffed Grouse
Horned Grebe
Western Grebe
Parasitic Jaeger
Franklin's Gull
Common Tern
Marbled Murrelet
Band-tailed Pigeon
Western Screech-Owl
Common Nighthawk
Skylark
Cliff Swallow
Western Bluebird
Vesper Sparrow
Western Meadowlark