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# My TrekLens & TrekNature Posts



John Reasbeck

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Okotoks, Alberta

March, 2015



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## Preface

This document is a compilation of all of the photos and initial posts that I made, using the member identifier “ubc64”, on the TrekLens website from November 5, 2008 to May 15, 2010, and on the TrekNature website from August 16, 2008 to June 24, 2011.

I posted sporadically on the two sites. Members were encouraged to comment on each other’s posts, as well as to assign points, if the photos were worthy in their view. It was a useful and enjoyable experience, for the most part. However, not all aspects of the environment appealed to me or most of the members. The member base has declined dramatically. Oh, most members’ photos might still be there, but hardly any new postings are being made.

Some members used to devote a huge amount of time to their postings and comments. Although the time I spent was not very much, in comparison to others, it was still considerable. We were only permitted to post one photo per day; but, in order to make substantial comments on others’ posts, those activities could easily take several hours a day.

I decided that I didn’t want to abandon all of the work I had done over

the years on TrekLens and TrekNature. Therefore, I used Microsoft Word to make a document with photos on one page and the corresponding text entries on the facing pages—I used “filler” pages to keep the entries together. I made those decisions assuming that I might someday print this document. I made a PDF file from the Word document. I generated a table of contents in the front, so that it’s possible to quickly go to any page of interest.

John Reasbeck  
Okotoks, Alberta  
March, 2015



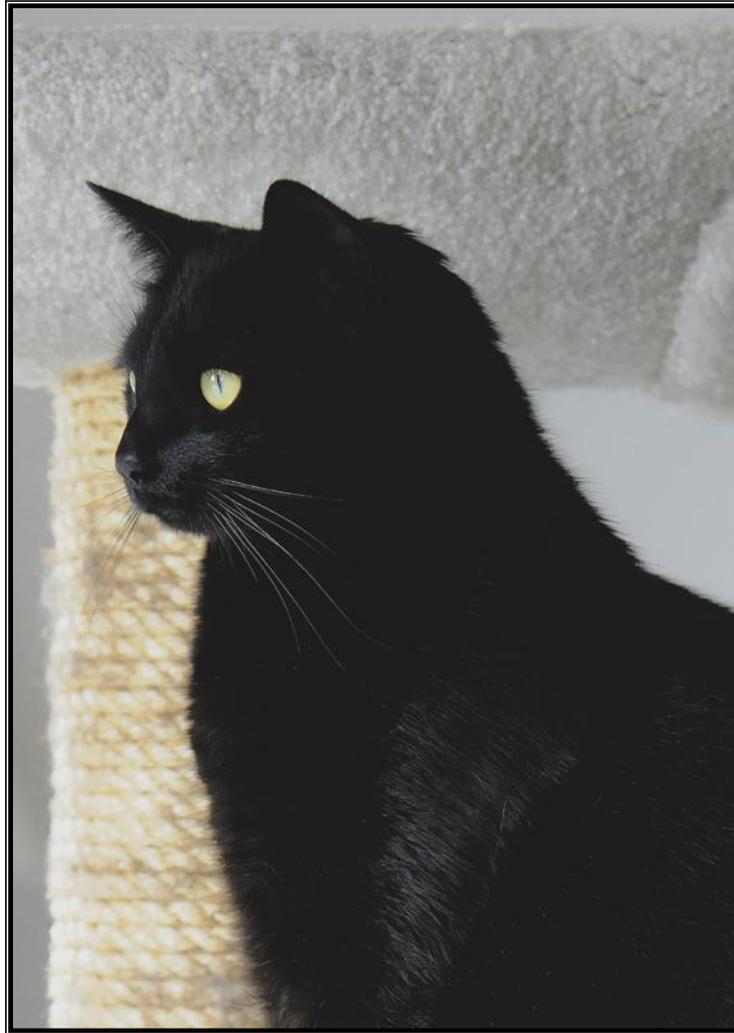
# My TrekLens Posts

## The Stretch



As my first TrekLens posting, permit me to introduce Hemi, one of our two black cats. He is a two-year old polydactyl. Hemi has six toes on both of his front paws -- just like his brother, Fitzi. We obtained both kitties from a shelter in Westerly last year. Hemi is a very athletic cat, and needs to stretch out from time to time. I took this shot last year, as Hemi stretched against a wall downstairs.  
Posted on 2008-11-05.

## Portrait of Fitzi



After posting my first TL photo, of Hemi stretching, I went through all of my archives of photos of his brother, Fitzi. I found a couple of possible photos, but nothing that I thought is of the same appeal as Hemi's shot. So, I decided to take a portrait of Fitzi this morning. I wanted to use natural light, so that I wouldn't do anything to the color of his lovely eyes. As it turned out, the best shot I took only shows one of his eyes clearly. Since my shooting position was over near the window, and since Fitzi had climbed up on the cat tree to look out the window, my portrait became more of a profile. But, I think that it still shows Fitzi's features and fur very nicely. I used ISO 800 on this one, which is no challenge at all for the D300. Since my 105mm has VR, my shutter speed of 1/100 seemed adequate.

So, Fitzi can relax. His brother is not the only kitty in the house that has been given special attention on TL.

I hope that you enjoy this Portrait of Fitzi, one of our two very special kitties. Posted on 2008-11-07.

## Ruby Meadowhawk



I took this shot of a dragonfly, in front of our house in Mystic, Connecticut, in September. I spotted it perched on a Canterbury Bells stalk, up against our large rock outcropping. It is difficult to know for sure, but the species is probably a Ruby Meadowhawk (*Sympetrum rubicundulum*). Although, it's possible that it might be a Cherry-faced Meadowhawk - the differences between them are very subtle. Since females of both species are beige, this dragonfly is a male.

The dragonfly looks like he has found something tasty in the top pod of the Canterbury Bells bush. Since dragonflies eat insects, I expect that he found a few such snacks in there. Perhaps, this is the dragonfly equivalent of airport dining, rather than in-flight meals, as is usually the case. :)

I took the photo with ISO set to 100, and shutter speed set to 1/400. My DOF was quite shallow with my aperture adjusted to f/4. In PP, I sharpened (in PS Elements), reduced the noise (using Neat Image), and cropped to a 3:2 aspect ratio. I didn't want to disturb any of the colors or details, so I left the BG alone. Posted on 2008-11-08.

## Ruby-throated Hummingbird



I took this shot of a female Ruby-throated hummingbird, coming to a feeder, three years ago. I have other photos showing wings that have been stopped perfectly. But, I like this photo because it has a sense of wing movement. The hummingbird's head and body have been stopped well. The claws, ready to land on the perch of the feeder, are quite interesting. My photo really should have had a blue background. But, my skills in PS Elements, and the capabilities of the product can only take me so far. I've enabled the Workshop on this one, so any wizards out there can feel free to work their magic.

The hummingbirds have left us for warmer weather this year, of course. We generally see them from the end of May until the end of August. The only species that have ever visited us in Mystic, CT is the Ruby-throated Hummingbird or *Archilochus colubris*. The males are the ones with the bright scarlet throat. The females have no such coloring. However, they are very beautiful in their own right. You can get some idea as to their plumage when they are at a feeder, but you can't really tell just how pretty they are until you see them in a photo. I used a 70-300mm zoom on my Nikon D70, with an SB-800 external flash. The tripod I used was a Slik AMT. I rely on the flash to stop the wings. Therefore, I can shoot at ISO

100, and still get good images, even when hummingbirds are in a shaded area.

I found useful information on Ruby-throated hummingbirds at the following URLs:

<http://www.hummingbirds.net/rubythroated.html>

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ruby-throated\\_Hummingbird](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ruby-throated_Hummingbird)

<http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/birds/ruby-throat-hummingbird.html>

<http://www.wvu.edu/~agexten/wildlife/hummer.htm>

Posted on 2008-11-10.

## Red Fox Filler Photo



This photo was never posted on TrekLens, but I needed to have something occupying the right page, since the previous post went beyond a page. This fox appeared in our backyard on Feb. 23, 2012. I captured him/her going under our fence.

## Blue Line Station in Boston



My wife and I had just visited the New England Aquarium and IMAX theater in Boston, and were on our way home to Mystic, Connecticut. We were at the Aquarium stop on the MBTA Blue Line. What does a TL member do, while waiting for a train? Why, take a photo, of course! After we were home, the challenge I presented to myself, as I did PP on this shot, was to see if I could crop with four diagonal lines into the four corners. I managed to do that, even though I cheated a bit on the bottom left corner. I enhanced the colors a little, tweaked the contrast, increased the brightness, reduced the noise and sharpened a little. All of the PP was done in PS Elements. The Image Stabilization in my Canon A650 IS seems like it worked well (or my hands were incredibly steady), since I took this shot at 1/40 sec. My ISO was 400, and my aperture was f2.8. Posted on 2008-11-17.

## A Smile from Nicole



I was at the Mystic Aquarium yesterday afternoon. I've visited there many times over the years, but it's only recently that I've been taking pictures at that facility. Mostly, I've found that the photographic opportunities are outside the aquarium building - I haven't yet mastered the art of taking pictures of fish in the large tanks. There are Beluga Whales, Penguins and Sea Lions outside. Many of the animals seem to enjoy watching the people, as much as the visitors like seeing them. The Sea Lions, in particular, are always a lot of fun to see. They frequently make me smile with their game playing.

The aquarium has guides at all of their exhibits. The person who was in attendance at the Sea Lions enclosure gave me a big smile as I arrived to take pictures. I didn't know how long I was going to spend there, because my hands were already starting to get cold. Nevertheless, I started taking some shots of a young Sea Lion. The guide, who must have been very cold indeed, to have been just standing around out there, told me about Astro, a two-year old Stellar Sea Lion. He was chasing a ball around their pool, and was having quite a good time. After I had taken some pictures, I turned to the guide and asked if I could take her picture. She said that would be OK, and gave me a big smile. I took several shots. I

thanked her for the extra photo op and for the information that she had provided.

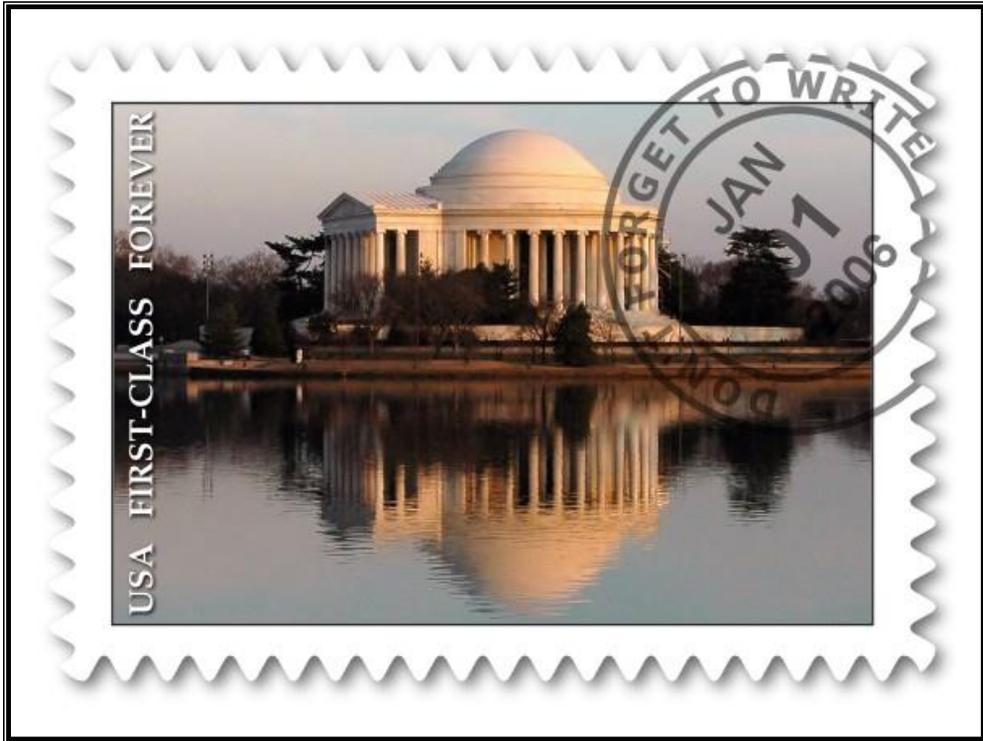
As I was doing PP on my shots from the aquarium, I thought that I must print a photo of my guide and give it to her. Then, this morning, I noticed on TL that some members were posting photos about “Smiles”. I found out that there is a theme for tomorrow on that subject. As a relatively new TL member, I hadn’t paid any attention to the themes. But, this one seemed to be calling my name. I went to the aquarium today, and showed the photo I had taken to one of the guides. I asked her if she could tell me if the guide in my picture was working today. She said that she was in the Penguins area, and that her name is Nicole. I looked her up and gave her the picture. Nicole was quite surprised; again, she flashed a big smile. I asked her if she would mind if I posted her picture on TL, especially, since the theme for tomorrow is about “Smiles”, and her picture certainly qualifies. She said that she would like that. Posted on 2008-11-17.

## Seagull and Sunset Filler Photo



I went to Steveston, B.C., in Sept., 2011. I was visiting two photographer friends, who showed me the sights of the area. One evening, I walked to one of the docks, and stayed for this beautiful sunset. An obliging seagull remained perched on a post, while I framed my shot.

## Jefferson Memorial Stamp



I've always thought that the Thomas Jefferson Memorial, in Washington, D.C., is a very attractive structure. It has most assuredly already been on many stamps in the U.S. I thought that it deserved to be on a stamp in our theme, "Stamps of the world".

In order to prepare this stamp, I used the link to the Framer software provided by Robert Calve (perryhooter).

From the Wikipedia link:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jefferson\\_Memorial](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jefferson_Memorial)

“The Thomas Jefferson Memorial is a presidential memorial in Washington, D.C. that is dedicated to Thomas Jefferson, an American Founding Father and the third president of the United States. The neoclassical building was designed by John Russell Pope. It was built by Philadelphia contractor John McShain. Construction began in 1939, the building was completed in 1942, and the bronze statue of Jefferson was added in 1947.”

Many interesting and insightful quotes by Thomas Jefferson can be found at:

[http://www.quotationspage.com/quotes/Thomas\\_Jefferson/31](http://www.quotationspage.com/quotes/Thomas_Jefferson/31).

Posted on 2008-11-23.

**Satisfaction!**



This is a shot of Baranoff, one of the Northern Fur Seals at the Mystic Aquarium. He's been drying his fur on a rock. I thought he had a very satisfied look on his face.

As explained in

<http://www.sfgate.com/getoutside/pinnipeds.html>, there are eared seals and earless seals. The latter are the true seals. The former are really sea lions. Just to make things confusing, the Northern Fur Seal has ears; therefore, it's really a sea lion.

In the same exhibit that shows the Northern Fur Seals, there are Stellar Sea Lions and a Harbor Seal. Stellar Sea Lions are quite a bit larger than Northern Fur Seals. A male Stellar Sea Lion could grow to be more than 2,000 pounds, or more than three times as large as a male Northern Fur Seal. The Harbor Seal is the smallest member of the exhibit group. Posted on 2008-11-24.

## American Robin



An American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*) visited our new Canadian home in Okotoks, Alberta, four days ago. It was the first robin we have seen here. In Mystic, Connecticut, where we lived for 12 years, we had become used to seeing robins much earlier in the year. In fact, I was never really sure that they always left the area in the winter.

The one in my photo is clearly a male. They have a vivid reddish-orange breast; while the females are more of a dull reddish-brown in that area. This one is truly a standout specimen. He didn't stay around long, but I managed to get a few shots of him on our back fence.

On the PP I did, I cropped fairly closely, because the house windows behind the robin weren't adding anything to the photo. Our fence slopes down, so there wasn't much that I could do about that aspect. I did tilt the shot a few degrees, so that the house siding behind the robin would be level. The robin still appeared to be perching normally. I had set my camera to ISO 800, which doesn't produce much noise from

my D300. However, since I noticed a little, I used Neat Image to eliminate it. Except for a touch of sharpness, I didn't use any other tools because the colors seemed to be good.

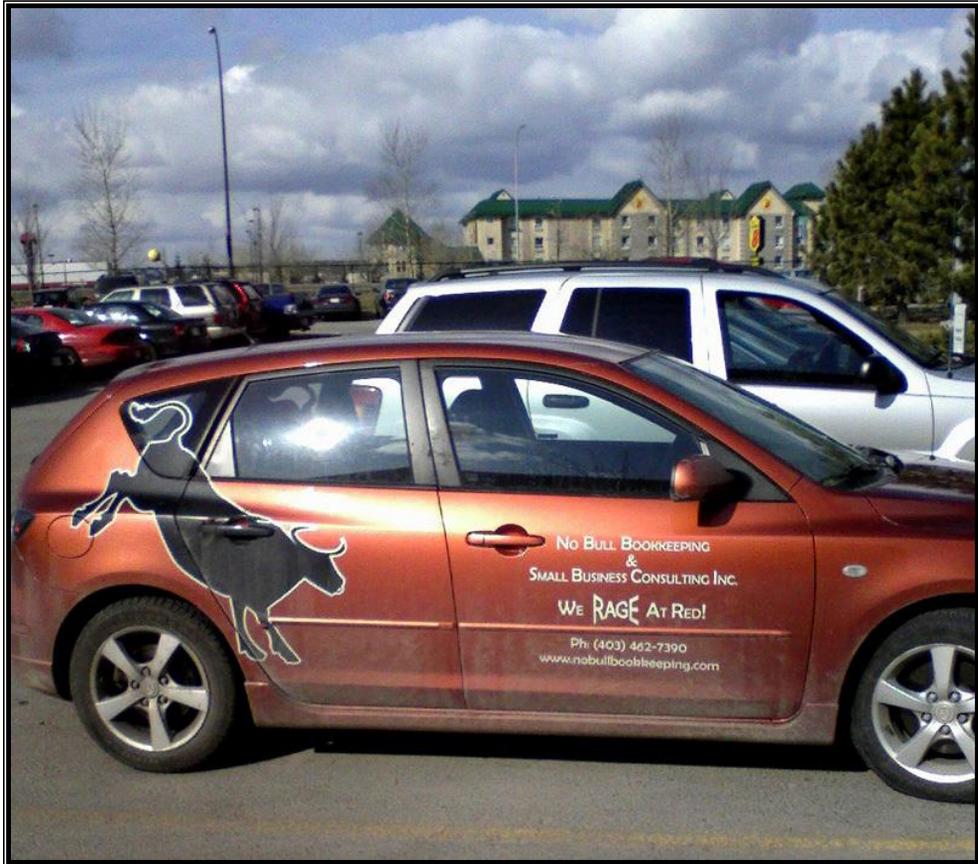
So, even though we could still get snow here before it's really spring, this robin is definitely an encouraging sign that warmer weather will soon be here. Posted on 2009-04-20.

## Flicker and Finch Filler Photo



Later in this book, there's a photo of the above House Finch, by himself. I posted that one in TrekLens. The above shot shows a thirsty Northern Flicker, which visited the heated water dish in our backyard, while the finch was sleeping.

## Cellphone Camera Theme Shot



As I was returning to my car, about a week ago, I was surprised to find the car in this photo near mine. The advertising on the side of the vehicle looked quite humorous. I didn't have any of my cameras with me, but I did have my cellphone -- a Samsung U540. Its resolution is only 1.3 MP, so I don't take a lot of shots with it. But, in this case, it permitted me to record an amusing memory.

The only PP I did was to tweak the brightness and contrast a bit, crop it landscape, and sharpen it.

I would never have thought to post it on TL, were it not for this week's theme. It seemed like a fun shot, captured with the requisite cellphone tool. Posted on 2009-04-23.

## Female House Finch



This photo shows a female House Finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*) perched on top of our feeder. When I manage to catch a bird in that location, I can usually get quite a clear photo, since the feeder is close to our house. Unfortunately, there is a fence behind the feeder that doesn't add much to the attractiveness of the shot. Of course, I can always minimize my DOF to blur the background, but then focusing becomes more critical. I don't necessarily have all of the time I would like when I'm taking photos of birds also.

In this case, I decided to experiment a little with my PP. I wanted to see what I could do with the Filter/Render/Lighting Effects tools in PhotoShop Elements. I tried a few of them, and eventually settled on using an elliptical spotlight at 2 O'clock. I figured that, since the finch was angled in that direction, I could illuminate her head nicely, and still have decent light for the length of her body. At the same time, I improved the background, by wiping out some undesirable portions. I sharpened the shot a bit and adjusted the brightness and contrast also. I wasn't going to add any framing, but I saw some posted shots with frames that looked very tasteful. So, I tried my hand at doing that using Paint Shop Pro. I created a double frame by using the border function twice. I colored the frames by using colors from the shot itself in order to try to make

everything blend nicely. When I was all finished, I resized to 800 pixels.

Perhaps, I messed around too much. But, to me, that's one of the things that I have looked to TL for - to give me the inspiration to try different things - to think about making pictures, not just snapping photos. I hope that I have succeeded somewhat with today's submission. In any case, I am now more familiar with some of the tools in my "digital darkroom." Posted on 2009-04-25.

## Bald Eagle Filler Photo



We went to the Alberta Birds of Prey Nature Centre in August, 2010. It's in southern Alberta, east of Lethbridge. This centre has taken in, nursed back to health, and released back to the wild, over 10,000 injured birds of prey over the years. This Bald Eagle was monitoring our activity.

## Male House Finch



This photo shows a male House Finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*) perched on an evergreen branch. He is in front of a window, which is in a neighbor's house. The early morning light illuminated the bird nicely and left the shaded window dark. I cropped around the bird with PhotoShop Elements, so that no part of the window frame would be seen. Thus, the appearance is that of a uniformly dark background and a lighted foreground. I used Neat Image to remove noise, with a little sharpening afterward. I used Paint Shop Pro to add the two borders, and PhotoShop Elements to color them and to resize. Posted on 2009-04-26.

## Cultural Architecture - Altos de Chavon



This photo shows the Church of St. Stanislaus at Los Altos de Chavón in the Dominican Republic. The church was one of the buildings created as part of the recreation of a medieval artists' village in Italy. My wife and I visited this village when our cruise ship, Celebrity Constellation, docked near Casa de Campo in the Dominican Republic in Feb./2005. When I became aware of the theme for this week, I immediately thought of our tour of this fantastic location, and the photos that I took.

I have pasted below some information about the church that I found at: [www.planetware.com/la-romana/altos-de-chavon-church-of-st-stanislaus-dom-ro-stan.htm](http://www.planetware.com/la-romana/altos-de-chavon-church-of-st-stanislaus-dom-ro-stan.htm):

The Church of St Stanislaus at the center of the Altos de Chavón was named after the patron saint of Poland in tribute to Pope John Paul II, who visited the island in 1979 and left some of the saint's ashes behind.

At the following site, I found a description of the village, which I have quoted below:

[www.losmejoresdestinos.com/destinos/republica\\_dominicana/altos\\_de\\_chavon\\_en.htm](http://www.losmejoresdestinos.com/destinos/republica_dominicana/altos_de_chavon_en.htm):

## THE VILLAGE ALTOS DE CHAVON

In 1976, on a verdant plateau 100 miles east of Santo Domingo (the historic capital of the Dominican Republic) an extraordinary cultural undertaking began to unfold.

Dominican stonecutters, woodworkers, and iron-smiths combined their crafts to create the rich architectural landscape that would emerge as Altos de Chavon. Today this vibrant cultural village perched high above the Chavon River embodies half a millennium of the island's finest tradition of crafts and art.

Below, I have included more village information that I found at:  
[www.casadecampo.com.do/?p=index\\_altos\\_de\\_chavon](http://www.casadecampo.com.do/?p=index_altos_de_chavon):

Altos de Chavon, is an architectural wonder, a 16th century replica of a Mediterranean village perched high above the Chavón River. The village was designed by Dominican architect Jose Antonio Caro, and created by Italian master designer and cinematographer Roberto Coppa. Dominican artisans handcrafted the stone pathways, decorative ironwork, furniture and enchanting

buildings, reviving almost forgotten crafts of metal work and stone carving. Under Coppa ´s direction, each stone was hand cut, each wooden door frame was handcrafted and each wrought-iron detail hand-forged. Construction of the village began in 1976 and the village was inaugurated in 1982 with the concert of Frank Sinatra at the amphitheater.

I only had my little 5MP Sony DSC-W1 camera with me on this trip. I took this shot with the lens adjusted to maximum wide angle at 7.9mm (or 38mm effective, related to 35mm format). I was using ISO 100, with a high shutter speed of 1/500 sec and aperture of f5.6. Due to the wide angle, my DOF was not too bad. I took the shot of the church from behind a pillar, in order to display a close-up of some of the architectural features and to provide some additional depth. I adjusted a bit for colors, contrast and brightness, and sharpened a little. I included the two tourists on the right in order to enable me to provide a reasonable aspect ratio for the photo - besides, I thought that they added some of the feeling of the visit. Posted on 2009-04-30.

## Hoverfly



Yesterday, on Mother's Day, I and some family members gathered for brunch at a restaurant near Mossleigh, in southern Alberta. I took pictures, of course. When I had finished with family photos, I wandered around the nursery that is attached to the restaurant, to see what I could find. I spotted an insect hovering, then it landed on a pretty red and yellow flower. I took a photo using the macro setting on my Canon A650 IS. I have since identified the insect as a hoverfly. In PP, I cropped the flower closely to the fly, in order to highlight its features. I did selective despeckling and blurring of sections of each petal, using the lasso tool in PS Elements for area selection.

In Wikipedia, I found the following information about the hoverfly: Flies in the family Syrphidae are commonly known as hoverflies, flower flies, or syrphid flies.

As their common names suggest, they are often seen hovering or nectaring at flowers; the adults of many species feed mainly on nectar and pollen, while the larvae (maggots) eat a wide range of foods. In some species, the larvae are saprotrophs, eating decaying plant and animal matter in the soil or in ponds and streams. In other species, the larvae are insectivores and prey on aphids, thrips, and other plant-sucking insects.

About 6,000 species in 200 genera have been described. Hoverflies are common throughout the world and can be found on every continent except Antarctica. Hoverflies are harmless to most other animals despite their mimicry of the black and yellow stripes of wasps, which serves to ward off predators. Posted on 2009-04-30.

## Sora Filler Photo



I took this shot at Frank Lake in July, 2014. Greg Wagner, of High River, had told me earlier that afternoon where I could expect to see some of these elusive birds. They were crossing the path to the observation blind to get from one feeding area to the other.

## The Goldfinches Have Arrived!



American Goldfinches arrived in our yard this morning for the first time this spring. They are amazingly colorful little birds! At one time, there were four males vying for spots on our four-perch feeder, which was already being occupied on two perches by House Finches. The larger finches didn't seem too inclined to share. Ultimately, the goldfinches prevailed, and they had the feeder all to themselves. We haven't installed yet what we consider to be a proper goldfinch feeder, a tube that dispenses Nyjer® seed (a.k.a. niger or nyger seed). Nevertheless, the goldfinches seemed to be content with the hulled sunflower seeds in our current container.

I took several shots of the goldfinches at the feeder. I hoped that they would perch in one of our trees; or, at least, go to the hook on top of our feeder. But, that wasn't to be today. Of the photos I captured, the one I've posted is the best. I did a little PP in order to remove the noise (there really wasn't much in the first place). And, I sharpened a little and cropped my photo in order to present a close-up of one of the goldfinches. I'm always attracted to shots that show their wings neatly folded, as well as their heads turned to look in my direction.

The paragraph below appears in

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American\\_Goldfinch:](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Goldfinch)

The American Goldfinch (*Carduelis tristis*), also known as the Eastern Goldfinch and Wild Canary, is a North American bird in the finch family. It is migratory, ranging from southern Canada to North Carolina during the breeding season, and from just south of the Canadian border to Mexico during the winter.

It is relatively easy to obtain much information about goldfinches, but I've provided a few of the better links I found below:

[http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/American\\_Goldfinch/id](http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/American_Goldfinch/id)

<http://www.care2.com/c2c/groups/disc.html?gpp=83&pst=1021923>

<http://talkaboutwildlife.ca/profile/?s=345>

<http://www.nhptv.org/NATUREWORKS/goldfinch.htm>

Posted on 2009-05-23.

## Sailboat and Clouds Filler Photo



In September, 2010, I went on an ANPAT (Annual Nikonians Photographic Adventure Trip) at the Olympic National Park, in Washington state. There were 24 Nikonians (a Nikon camera owners group) members who took advantage of this trip. We explored various parts of the Olympic National Park.

## Get Out of Here! (Emotion Theme)



I was walking around in a local wetlands area yesterday in the late afternoon. I heard piercing cries coming from the water's edge on one side of a pond. As I got closer, the cries became louder, and seemingly, more insistent. There was a small bird standing there looking at me, just staring me down. I recognized it later as a Killdeer. It was making loud "kill-dee, kill-dee" calls. I was able to get quite close to the bird, and managed to get a good shot of it, with its beak fully open shrieking at me. I thought to myself, when I saw what the theme is for this week, here's a bird that was certainly showing emotion! Posted on 2009-06-04.

## Ragdoll for the Collection



A theme for cats was created recently. It was suggested that a cat from each breed would be a good idea. Therefore, I thought that perhaps a photo of my mother's Ragdoll cat, Andy, might be an acceptable addition. He's not a pure Ragdoll - I think that his mother is though.

Andy is about three years old, and is still quite a kitten at heart. He gets into everything. He does seem to be quite amenable to having his picture taken, however. The one I have posted shows Andy with a cushion that I had just placed behind him to give my photo a bit more color. Andy never moved, as I arranged the cushion. His eyes are soft blue with medium blue centers, just as I have shown in the picture. Ragdoll cats are supposed to be somewhat laid back, and make good inside cats. However, for the most part, the placid gene doesn't appear to be present in Andy -- aside from short posing sessions. Just after I took this photo, Andy tackled my mother's older cat, Mira - she's a Tonkinese, I believe. Posted on 2009-06-07.

## Male House Finch



We are regularly visited by House Finches, since we installed feeders in our backyard. This one perched on our deck railing prior to going to the feeder. The adult males that we see typically have either red or orange heads. They also have a piece at the top of their tail that matches their head coloring.

In the PP, I cleaned up the deck railing a little using the spot and healing brushes in PS Elements. I also cleaned up the top of the shot because the BG wasn't as pleasant as I wanted. I sharpened a little also. Posted on 2009-07-15.

## Cute Gopher



When I visit Frank Lake, Alberta, there are often one or two gophers near where cars are parked. Actually, I believe that their correct name is Richardson's Ground Squirrels or *Spermophilus richardsonii*. I think that they are not really true gophers, but people call them that anyway.

On Aug. 20, as I was returning to my car, one of the rodents was nearby. I removed the lens cap from my camera, and he stood up, with his paws hanging down. I could see that he was nibbling on some of the grass. I took a few shots. After I got home, I discovered that the exposures were terrible. The grass around the gopher was a much lighter green colour than it had been. The gopher was too light also. It's a wonder that the image was in focus too, because I had my zoom extended to 300mm (450mm effective) and the shutter speed was 1/160 sec. Either I was holding my camera really steady or the VR worked wonders -- maybe, both. The gopher looked so cute though, with a piece of grass hanging out of his mouth. I decided that I would try to save the shot by using the Hue/Saturation, Color Balance and Brightness/Contrast adjustments in CS4. I did a little Smart Sharpening too. I cropped the image so that the gopher with his piece of grass would stand out better. I'll post my original shot to the Workshop, subject to upload constraints, so that anyone who is so inclined can try their hand at adjustments. Posted on 2009-08-29.

## Explorer of the Seas Visits New London



On Sept. 15/07, I was up at 5am so that I could go down to Shore Ave. in Groton, Connecticut, and welcome the Explorer of the Seas to New London (Groton is just across the river from New London). That vessel is one of the cruise ships that docked at New London's State Pier in 2007. My photo shows the grand ship coming into the city via the Thames River. It was still fairly dark when the ship arrived, all lit up brightly -- it was quite a sight, indeed! I struggled with getting the exposure right. Unfortunately, I only had my monopod with me, instead of my tripod, but I managed to get a few good shots. I was using ISO 200 at the time I took this shot, although I later switched to 1600. With the ship going away from me, and with the monopod helping to steady my shot, I was able to use a fairly low shutter speed.

Explorer of the Seas, by the way, is a 138,000 ton ship, and is 1,020 feet long. It can accommodate 3,114 passengers. The Connecticut Cruise Ship Task Force has been trying to interest Royal Caribbean, Holland America, Princess Cruise Lines and other cruise lines to book ports at New London. They have pointed out that ships, even as large as Royal Caribbean's Explorer of the Seas, can dock right in New London, rather than having to dock outside the harbour, as they have to do at some other eastern US ports.

Except for 2009, the task force has been very successful. When the economy improves, no doubt New London port calls will again be included in some of the major cruise lines' itineraries.

When I lived in Connecticut, I took some photos of the cruise ships that visited New London. I passed them along to George Cassidy, the Executive Director of the task force. If you go to the following URL, you can see one of my shots on the task force site:

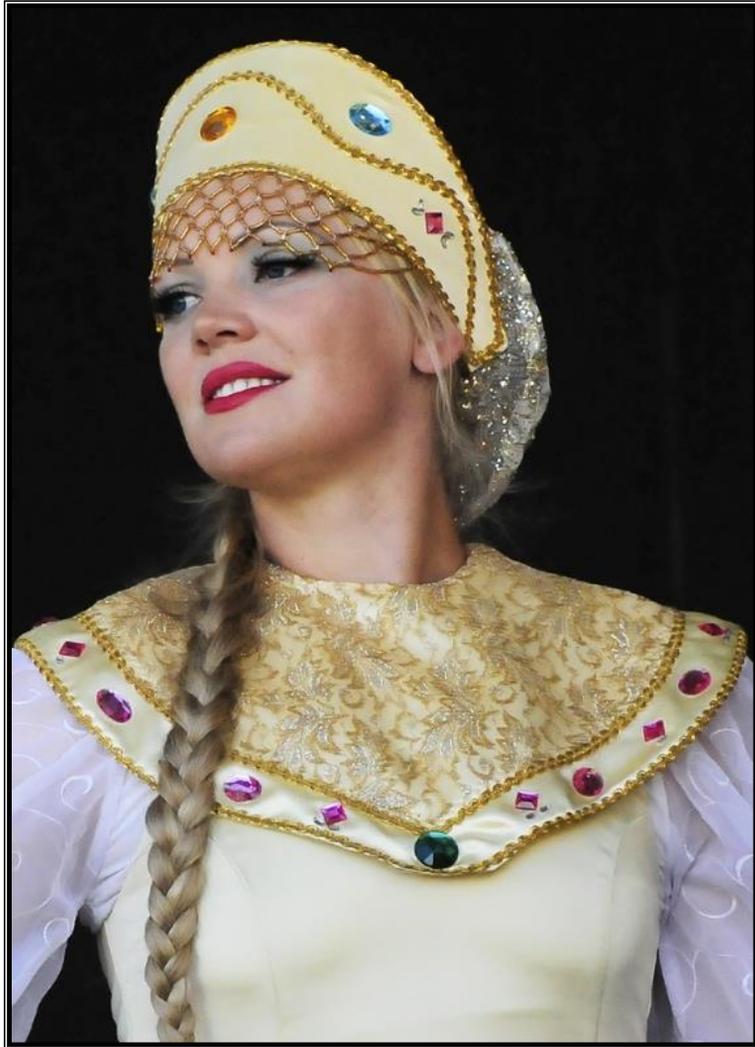
[http://members.tripod.com/uss\\_oxford/TASKFORCE.html](http://members.tripod.com/uss_oxford/TASKFORCE.html). You can also read about some of the other cruise ships that have docked in New London. Posted on 2009-09-09.

## Mute Swan Filler Photo



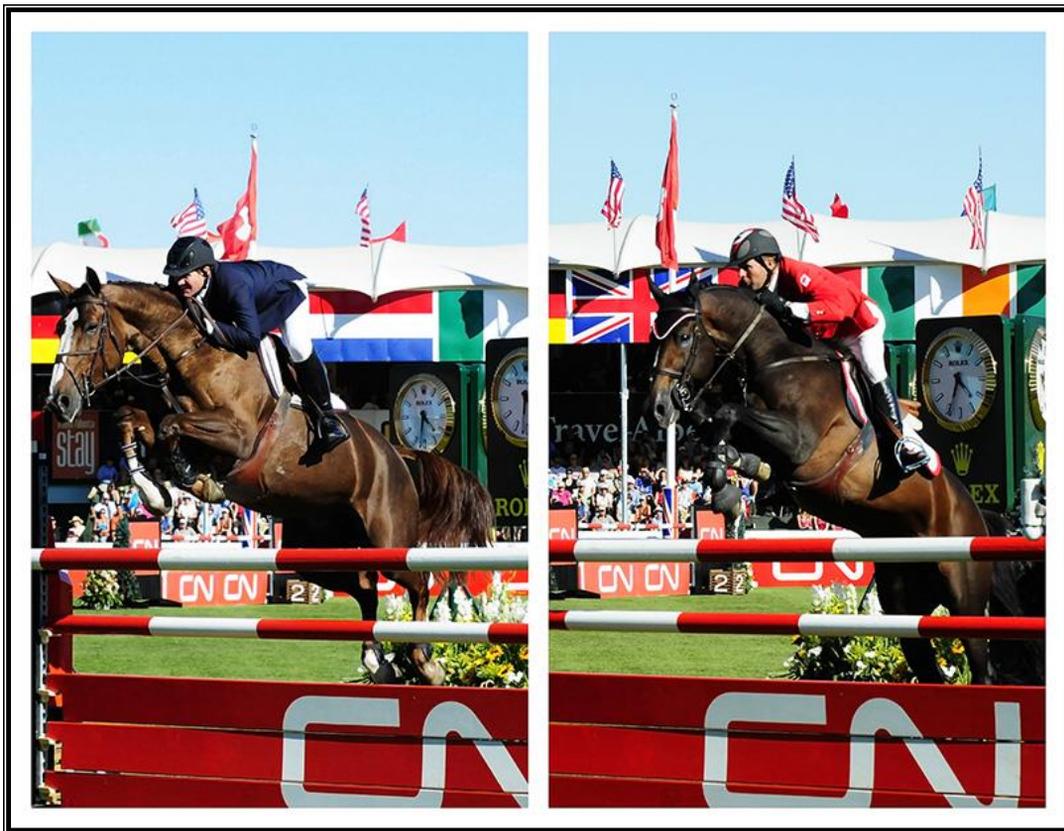
This photo has a special place in my archives. I took it with my first digital camera, a Canon PowerShot S110. The location was along the Mystic River, in Mystic, CT.

## Zabava Dancer



I attended the Masters Tournament at Calgary's Spruce Meadows facility on Sept. 12. Primarily, I was there to photograph the show jumping. World-class riders come to Spruce Meadows from many countries to compete. Following the team event, which was won by the team representing the Netherlands, my wife and I decided to watch the performers on one of the outdoor stages. A dance troupe called the Zabava Russian Folk Dance Group was just about to perform. I had never seen them before, and I know nothing about Russian folk dancing, but I thought that they were magnificent. I took a few photos, but I didn't expect much in the way of quality shots. The stage was fairly dark; I set my ISO to 1600 and hoped for the best. I did a little PP in order to present the colours the way I remember them. The photo I have posted is my favourite one of the set. This beautiful lady appeared in several of the dances they performed. She, and all of the performers in her group, seemed to have a very magical stage presence. Their dances were quite amazing. I didn't realize how intricate their costumes were until I studied my photos. I look forward to the time when I can see Zabava dance again. Posted on 2009-09-13.

## CN Grand Prix at Spruce Meadows



Calgary's Spruce Meadows Masters Tournament was held this year on Sept. 9-13. The final day featured the CN International Grand Prix event, with \$1,000,000 in prizes. Horses and riders from 17 countries participated. Former Olympic champions and world champions competed for the top spot. A crowd of 73,736 saw McLain Ward, from the U.S., riding Sapphire, defeat Eric Lamaze, from Canada, riding Hickstead. The competition came down to a jump off, since neither rider had accumulated any faults during the first two rounds. Both Ward and Lamaze handled the jump off clean as well, but Ward was 2/100 sec. faster than Lamaze.

I was only going to present a photo of the winner. But, I thought that it's only fitting, with the closeness of the match, that I make a collage showing both competitors (Ward on the left, and Lamaze on the right) going over the second last barrier in the jump off round. That fence was the best one from my vantage point.

I took both of the shots at ISO 800, f/10, and 1/1000 sec. My lens was at 75mm (112mm effective) for the left shot and 85mm (127mm effective) for the right shot. I made the collage in Picasa 3, and did the colour balancing and resizing in CS4. Posted on 2009-09-14.

## A Photographer - People at Work



On Aug. 9, I attended a show jumping competition at Twin Oaks in Richmond, BC. The weather was a bit overcast, but the event was enjoyable. After the competition, I spotted a professional photographer carrying all of his gear across the arena. I sometimes consider taking a monopod with me to an event, but mostly I just hand hold shots. As for my camera equipment, usually I only have my Nikon D300 and one lens -- typically, my 70-300 VR. For wide angle shots, I use my Canon A650, which I carry on my belt. I have a considerably lighter load than the fellow in my photo. But then, my results probably don't compare with his either. He is a person who was definitely at work. Posted on 2009-09-18.

## Intense Fall Colors in Connecticut



This is my posting for this week's "Intense Colors" theme. I live in western Canada now, so I don't see the intense autumn colours that I was privileged to view when I lived in Connecticut. The photo that I have chosen shows a glimpse of the trees at Beebe Pond in southeastern Connecticut. That small body of water is located just off Long Island Sound, between the villages of Noank and Mystic. I took this photo last year in October. The shot contains quite a variety of trees and shrubbery. Maple, Sumac, Ash and Cedar are included, together with many other species. The colours were quite intense right out of my camera. However, I enhanced them a little more with selective colour adjustments in PP. I did colour balancing and brightness/contrast adjustments as well. Posted on 2009-10-15.

## Glistening Water at Gilbert's Beach



This photo shows a view from Gilbert's Beach, which is just east of Steveston, BC in Canada. The body of water is the Fraser River. It flows into Georgia Strait, then to the Pacific Ocean. It was in the early evening, and the setting sun was causing the light to dance on the water.

In PP, I increased blue a bit, as well as the contrast. I used Curves to even and enhance the light somewhat. I applied Vibrance a bit too, for a further enhancement. My final adjustment before resizing was to apply a Warming Filter at 20%. Posted on 2009-11-27.

## Sleeping House Finch



It can be very cold in Alberta. My wife bought a heated dog's dish to use as a bird bath/water dish in the winter. Even when it's cold, there are sparrows and finches in our backyard. We provide hulled sunflower seeds and Nyjer seeds, as well as suet and peanuts for our bird friends. The heated dish was an instant hit when the temperature got below freezing -- you can see a little snow on the rocks in the background in this photo. After getting a little food (you can still see some on his beak), one of the finches came to the dish to have a drink. It was so warm in the dish that the bird decided to have a little nap on a rock. I managed to get a shot before he woke up.

In PP I added some contrast and selectively enhanced the colours a little.

A Merlin visited our yard that day. Hopefully, the finch wasn't sleeping then! Posted on 2009-12-04.

## The Effect of Time -- Winter & Summer



For this week's theme, I selected two shots that show the effect of almost 17 months on our former home in Mystic, CT. I took the top photo in early March/2003, and the bottom one at the end of July/2004. Winter was normally not too severe in Mystic -- especially, if you compare it with the weather in our current location in Okotoks, Alberta, Canada.

Sometimes, we didn't have much snow at all in Mystic in March. However, in 2003, we were continuing to have real winter. July was beautiful in 2004, as it was in the previous year.

I'm sure that TL members who have joined more than a few months ago would probably be able to handle the PP for this photo. However, for those who may be unsure, I did the following: 1) cropped each of the shots so that they had the same aspect ratio (in this case, 2:3), 2) gave both shots the same density or dots per inch (I used 180 dpi) and number of pixels wide (in this case, 1600), 3) opened PhotoShop with the top image, 4) adjusted the canvas size so that it was twice as high while placing the shot in the upper left corner, 5) opened the second image and copied it to the Windows clipboard, 6) pasted the clipboard image onto the canvas containing the first image -- repositioned to the bottom half of the canvas, 7) saved the new combined image so that I could go back if I needed to, 8) used the text tool to identify the shots with "March/2003" and "July/2004" in the bottom right corners, 9) changed the image size to

800 pixels high with the file size at maximum quality, 10) used the sharpen tool to make the combined image a bit sharper, and 11) saved the image again with the quality adjusted so that the file size was less than 300 KB. Posted on 2010-01-21.

## Mule Deer Buck Filler Photo



Mule Deer visit the backyards of our neighbourhood almost every week; they're found in many other communities in Okotoks as well. This young buck came by in February, 2014.

## Great Blue Herons' Fishing Competition



When I was in Richmond, BC, in August/09, I saw eight Great Blue Herons fishing near a ferry terminal. They were standing in the water about 30-100 feet from the shore. Only a few of the herons were catching fish. The fish they did catch were quite small. Suddenly, one of the herons speared a large Bullhead fish. Instead of gulping it down as the others had done with their smaller catches, the heron walked past all of the other birds to the shore. As soon as it put the fish down, another heron challenged it. I kept taking photos. The successful bird decided that it did not wish to compete with the other one, and flew off. In the photo, the challenger is the one on the left. The fish is off to the lower right of the photo. Note the seagulls on the left, ready to take anything that they might be able to get away with. When I examined my photos, I noticed that both of the herons had been injured in many areas of their bodies -- presumably, in other fish fights. This competition for fish seemed to be a reasonable fit for this week's theme. Posted on 2010-02-18.

## Canada Geese over Bow River



Yesterday, on Mar. 1, I visited the Inglewood Bird Sanctuary in Calgary, Alberta. There's a spot at the end of one of the trails, which provides an excellent view of the Bow River. There were Mallards and Seagulls standing on many of the large pieces of ice that have not yet been broken up. Goldeneyes let themselves be taken by the current down the river, where they dove under the edge of the ice to find some food. Then, they flew back up the river. The sky was quite blue, with only a trace of light clouds. It was indeed a lovely afternoon.

While I was taking in all of the activity on the river, two Canada Geese flew overhead. The photo I have posted is the first one I took of them. It shows the lead goose poised to make a "power stroke", and the one behind ready to exercise a "recovery stroke". I was using ISO 800, and had to deal with a little noise. I used Neat Image to do noise reduction, and CS4 to crop and slightly sharpen (carefully). I increased the contrast a bit and reduced the brightness just a touch, so that I could bring out the birds a little and maintain the subtle clouds in the blue sky. Posted on 2010-03-02.

## Canada Goose Landing on Bow River



Yesterday, I was at the Inglewood Bird Sanctuary in Calgary. Most of the shots I took were from the end of one of the trails, where there's a good view of the Bow River. As you can see, there's still ice and snow there. Although, while I was there, several large pieces of ice broke off and were carried down the river. The shot I've posted shows a Canada Goose coming in for a landing near a Mallard. Throughout the several hours I was there, ducks and geese either landed on the ice or flew off to different locations -- typically, somewhere else along the river. Many of the birds were in the water, although most were on the ice.

In PP, I had to crop some of the top of the shot, so I balanced the top portion with the bottom. I applied a little brightness and contrast, and used the Gamma Correction. I also did a little Smart Sharpen. Obviously, I could have cropped the Mallard, but I thought that he added a little reference and balance. Posted on 2010-03-06.

## Kitty Basket Not Required



Sometimes, I need to post a fun shot. This is Andy. He's my mother's cat. I took this photo about 2 1/2 years ago, when I was visiting her. Andy doesn't necessarily curl up in places where you might expect him to do that. In this case, my mother found him in her bathroom sink. She pointed him out to me, and I quickly snapped his picture. He has a kitty basket that my mother thought he might like, but he doesn't spend much time in it. He prefers to find his own spots -- like most cats.

PP was a bit tricky, because I had to retain a little grey in Andy's face, while leaving the fur in his body with a soft brown shade. Also, bathroom sink areas often require a little cleaning up if they are going to be featured prominently in photos. I used Picasa for cropping and red eye correction, and CS4 for colour balancing/enhancing, touching up, sizing, noise reduction, and sharpening. Posted on 2010-03-16.

## Blurred, But Not Bokeh



I wish that I had a shot that might qualify for the "Bokeh" theme submission. But, I don't. I didn't know what it was until Linda opened the theme. There are now a number of photos posted that appear to my eyes and understanding to be appropriate and wonderful "Bokeh" submissions. The photo that I'm offering today has a nicely blurred BG, but I wouldn't say that it is "Bokeh". Nevertheless, I think that it has an interesting three-dimensional effect. I took the shot in our backyard. I was practicing to capture birds in flight. The bird in my photo is a female House Finch. I left the feeder in the shot, because I thought that it contributed to the 3-D effect. I did PP primarily in CS4 and Neat Image. Most of the work was in colour balancing. Posted on 2010-03-26.

## Scarlet Finch



I took this shot last June in our backyard. A male House Finch was posing nicely on our deck railing. Male House Finches get vividly coloured in the spring. In fact, I felt that I had to reduce the saturation a little in this shot, since the bird's colouring seemed too unrealistic -- the light must have been hitting him just right. The male House Finches that we see here are either red or orange in their upper body areas. I used this photo for the cover of a calendar that I made for this year. Posted on 2010-03-29.

**Got Seed!**



I've always thought this shot was humorous. My wife had put out a seed block for the birds. Usually, she would place them across the street in a small wooded area. However, on this occasion, she had unwrapped a new seed block and had just left it beside a flower bed in our front yard. There were a "few" squirrels around our neighborhood at our former home in Mystic, Connecticut. They used to try to get the seeds that we put in our bird feeders. They would harvest what they could from the ground under the feeders also. The squirrel in my photo evidently thought that he had found a goldmine. I found him sitting on the block as I opened our front door. Quickly grabbing my camera, I was able to take a couple of shots. Actually, I could have taken my time, because the squirrel didn't really want to leave the seed block.

By the way, the title of this photo was inspired by a wild bird food store that we used to go to. They were selling t-shirts with a squirrel on the front, with his face all covered with birdseed. Under the squirrel was the question, "Got Seed?" Posted on 2010-04-05.

## Common Goldeneye at Inglewood



I took this photo at the Inglewood Bird Sanctuary in Calgary, Alberta. The bird is a male Common Goldeneye duck. He had just landed in the water and caused the gold reflections in the water, due to the early evening sun, to break up around him. I was quite close to where he landed, so I managed to capture the details of his plumage not too badly. The colouring of this duck depends a lot on the light. The head can appear to be black, purple or dark green. In this case, it seems to be mostly black with a little dark purple. His golden eye is quite distinctive. In PP, I used CS4 to do colour balancing, contrast, gamma correction and exposure adjustments, as well as noise reduction and a little sharpening. Posted on 2010-04-09.

## Atlas Moth



In 2002, on a cruise ship stop, my wife and I visited the Butterfly Farm on the French side of the Caribbean island of Saint Martin/Sint Maarten (see <http://www.thebutterflyfarm.com/>). It's a truly beautiful enclosure containing butterflies from around the world. I only had my little Canon PowerShot S110 (my first digital camera!), but I managed to take quite a few fairly decent shots. The one I've posted today shows an Atlas moth (*Attacus Atlas*), newly emerged from its chrysalis. These moths are the largest ones in the world. In the wild, they are found in the tropical and subtropical forests of Southeastern Asia. Their wingspan is 25-30 cm (or 10-12 in). Notice the very distinctive wing tips on both sides. The species possesses markings that look like snake heads. Apparently, they quite effectively deter predators. These moths don't eat anything, because they lack fully-formed mouthparts. They survive entirely on larval fat throughout their 1-2 week adult lives. The following site contains more information about these very wonderfully-marked gigantic creatures: [http://www.cirrusimage.com/Moths\\_Atlas.htm](http://www.cirrusimage.com/Moths_Atlas.htm).

In PP, I straightened the photo on the platform post using Picasa. I cropped in Picasa, choosing what seemed to be the best presentation of the moth, the hanging chrysalises and the platform. Then I adjusted the contrast up a little and the brightness up very little in CS4. I used the Healing Brush to clean up the wall of the enclosure a little. I did slight

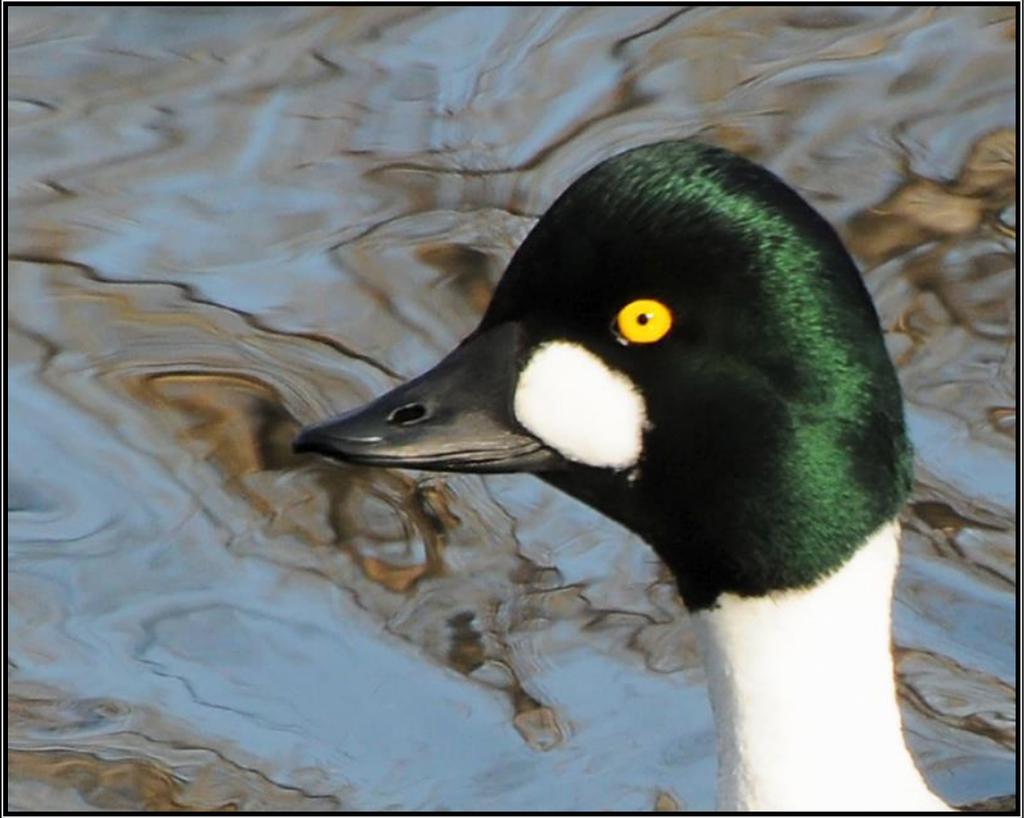
noise reduction in CS4, choosing to retain all of the details, but reducing some of the colour noise. After reducing the image size to 800 pixels, I used Smart Sharpen to provide a small amount of sharpening. I refrained from using any colour or saturation adjustments, since they did not seem to be required. Posted on 2010-04-14.

## Black Tern with Grasshopper Filler Photo



Do Black Terns eat grasshoppers? Evidently, they do. I took this photo in July, 2014 at Weed Lake. These birds are a little smaller than the Forster's or Common Terns. Generally, they keep their distance from the larger, white terns. This one apparently got tired of waiting for a chance to fish, and obtained substitute food.

## Portrait of a Goldeneye



We're starting to have some very nice spring days now in Calgary. I went to the Inglewood Bird Sanctuary yesterday. Two Common Goldeneye ducks were there on one of the small ponds. I like to go there in the early evening, because the reflections on the water are quite interesting. I was close enough to the male duck, and the light was just right, so that I was able to capture the rich emerald green of his head. I posted a shot of a male Goldeneye before, so I didn't want to post another one -- even though the light was better. I settled on a portrait this time, in order to display the colours of his head and the patterns in the water behind him.

In PP, after cropping the duck's head, so that his eye was at the 1/3 point in both directions, I adjusted the contrast and brightness a bit. Then, I did some selective saturation of green, yellow, blue and cyan -- not much, just enough to offset the reduced light for the time of day. I also adjusted vibrance up a bit. Finally, I did a slight amount of noise reduction and sharpening. Posted on 2010-04-16.

## American Robin at Inglewood



The American Robins are out in force at the Inglewood Bird Sanctuary, and probably all other locations in Alberta that they frequent. In other words, spring is here for sure -- notwithstanding a snowfall or two that might occur, just when we think we're in the clear. I spotted this robin hunting for anything that moves on the shore of one of the small ponds at Inglewood. He took time to pose briefly on a log for me, then went about his business.

In PP, I used CS4's Curves to try to even the light. Then I used Color Balance to make some additional corrections. I cropped the shot to bring out the details of the robin a little, and trim the busy BG. Then I used Noise Reduction to eliminate the ISO 800 noise. After reducing the image size to 800 pixels, I used Smart Sharpen a little. Finally, Vibrance brought out the robin's red breast a little more. Posted on 2010-04-20.

## A Hunting Chickadee



Black-capped Chickadees like to eat insects. That's not to say that they ignore other food -- especially, handouts from passersby at places like sanctuaries. I was at the Inglewood Bird Sanctuary in an area that I have come to associate with the presence of chickadees. One of them flew into the bushes on my right, just up from the bank of a small pond, and started hopping along the branches upside down. As I have learned from various Web sites (e.g., <http://www.wild-bird-watching.com/Chickadees.html>), this is how chickadees find insects, their eggs and their larvae on the undersides of leaves and twigs.

In PP, I did a little cleaning up of this shot. There were a couple of strands of a spider web that I thought detracted a bit, so I removed them with the Healing Brush in CS4. Everything else is the way I found it, except that I did some noise reduction and sharpening. I also increased the saturation, brightness and contrast a little, in order to compensate for the relatively dark lighting conditions in the bushes. Posted on 2010-04-21.

## Splashes of Colour



Every day, more and more birds build their nests at Red Deer Lake in Lloyd Park. That large marshy location is just west of Spruce Meadows off Hwy. 22X, in Calgary, Alberta. I went there today to try to find something appropriate for this week's "Splash" theme. I was concentrating on Canada Geese landing on the lake, and the splashes made by American Coots as they chased each other. Toward the end of my shoot, I spotted some male Red-winged Blackbirds and Yellow-headed Blackbirds in the reeds. As I was trying to get into position to get a good shot of a Yellow-headed Blackbird, which was about 50 feet away, a Red-winged Blackbird landed on a reed about 20 feet away from me -- he was even in better light than the other bird. I took a number of shots. Male Red-winged Blackbirds like to thrust out their pretty red and yellow shoulder patches when they sing. Most of my shooting was done during those very colourful exhibitions. So, here's my entry for the "Splash" theme: "Splashes of Colour". Posted on 2010-04-23.

## An Infrequent Visitor



A Merlin visited our backyard this morning. They don't come very often, but when they do, they cause the finches and sparrows to go instantly into hiding.

These birds are a member of the Falconidae (or falcon) family. Some people have referred to them as Pigeon Hawks. Merlins have a wingspan of 50-67 cm (20-26 in). The preceding information came from the iBird Explorer app for the iPod/iPhone.

After he/she had gone, it was quite some time before we saw any of the usual small birds in our yard. When they did return, they were unusually wary for awhile.

I had to crop fairly closely to the Merlin, in order to hide some distractions. I did colour balancing and adjusted the light a little, since it was a bit overcast. As well, I did noise reduction, because I was shooting with high ISO. And, I sharpened the image a little. Posted on 2010-04-25.

## Franklin's Gull Flyby



I've been using this shot for the past few days as my Windows wallpaper. It shows a Franklin's Gull at Red Deer Lake in Calgary, Alberta. The gulls frequently swoop down to catch insects near the water, and come reasonably close to me as they fly up again. I was fortunate to catch this one on one of those near flybys.

In PP, in addition to cropping, all I did was to adjust the contrast and brightness a little, and do noise reduction and sharpening. Posted on 2010-04-26.

## Trumpeter Swan at Red Deer Lake



Last week, I was privileged to see the swan in my photo, flying over Red Deer Lake, in Calgary, Alberta. I thought that it was a Tundra Swan initially, but I have since determined, from *The Sibley Guide to Birds*, that it was actually a Trumpeter Swan. According to the iBird Explorer app for iPod/iPhone, this swan is the largest waterfowl species native to North America. They can be up to 6 ft (1.8 m) long, and have a wingspan of up to 8.5 ft (2.6 m). These birds were hunted almost to extinction by 1900, but their population now is said to be about 16,000.

The light was tricky in this shot. The early evening sun was shining directly at the side of the swan. I had to adjust brightness and contrast to compensate. I used Neat Image to do noise reduction, since I was shooting with high ISO. And, I used CS4 to do a little sharpening. The cropping I selected was 16:10, to emphasize the swan's long body. Posted on 2010-05-06.

## American Avocet



For those who have never seen one, allow me to introduce you to an American Avocet. I saw this elegant bird at Frank Lake, Alberta yesterday. That was the first time that I've been able to get close enough to one for a decent photo. It is a large, long-legged shorebird that stands about 45 cm (18 in) tall. I believe that the one in my photo is a male, since the bird that he was with is lighter coloured on her head and neck. Their upturned bill is "just the right shape for skimming food off the surface of shallow waters." (From the Birds of Alberta Field Guide.) Posted on 2010-05-11.

## Air Avocets

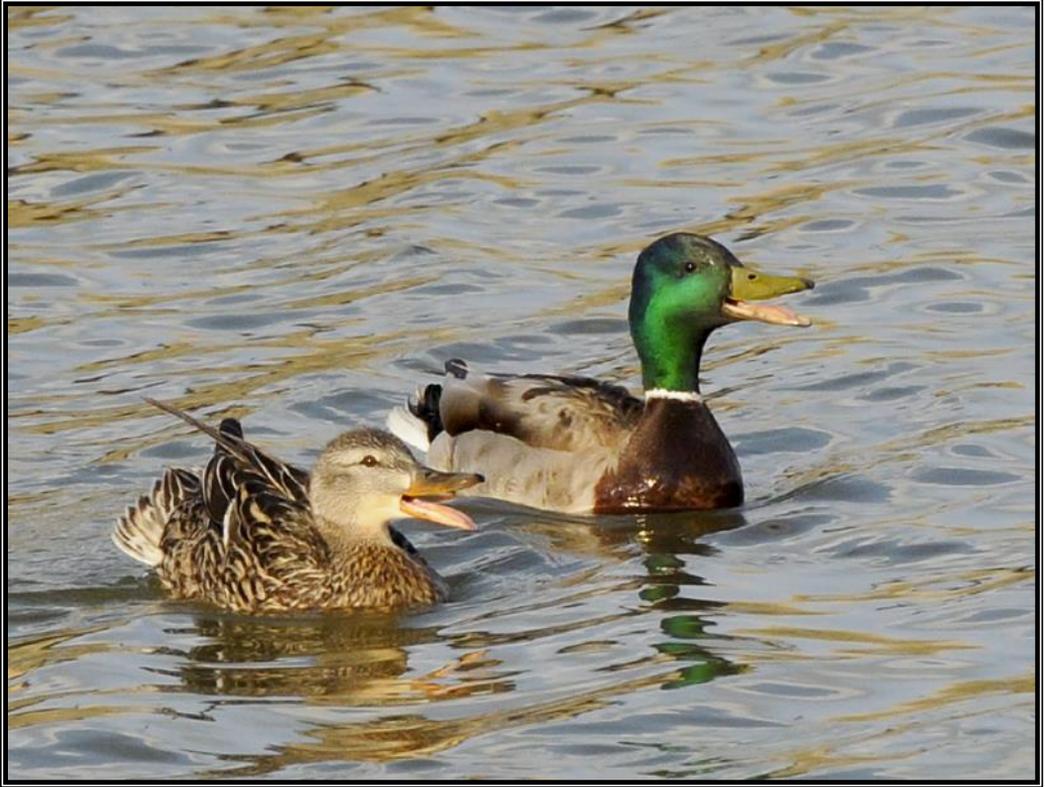


After posting a photo of a male American Avocet yesterday, I thought that I would share a shot of the male and female flying away after I got too close to them. As with the photo yesterday, I was at Frank Lake, Alberta.

One thing I learned quite quickly with photos of American Avocets is that their fine features really aren't conducive to image sharpening. I did adjust the brightness and contrast a bit, as well as the vibrance and saturation. I did a tiny amount of noise reduction as well.

I thought that the title of "Air Avocets" was fitting. The word "Avocet" has been associated in the past with aircraft and airlines (see <http://www.avocet-charters.com/frameset.htm>, <http://www.microlightjets.com/manufacturers/avocetaircraft.htm> and [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Avro\\_Avocet](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Avro_Avocet)). Also, that was the first time that I had ever seen American Avocets take to the air. Posted on 2010-05-12.

## Smiling Ducks



It's SATURDAY, at least, it is in North America. So, I thought that a happy shot would be appropriate. I was walking down by one of the local ponds, when I saw a pair of Mallards. There was a second male Mallard steaming towards them from the right, off the picture. The pair of Mallards was starting to get a little concerned that the new guy was getting a little too close -- in breeding season, it's never good when another male tries to get too friendly. There was much quacking, as the maverick male drew closer. I focused on the pair, because it was clear that there was going to be a little action here. In fact, they abruptly flew away when the second male was right on top of them, and I got my action shot. I also got a bonus shot; as I was going over my photos later, I saw this one with both ducks seemingly smiling, as they quacked their concern.

So, for all TL members who could use some cheering up, I offer these "Smiling Ducks". HAPPY SATURDAY, or HAPPY SUNDAY, as the case may be! Posted on 2010-05-15.



# My TrekNature Posts

## Blue Dasher Dragonfly



I took this shot of a dragonfly in front of our house in Mystic, CT. The stalk, upon which the dragonfly is perching, is part of a Canterbury Bells bush. I usually take photos of birds or butterflies, so I am quite a neophyte when it comes to dragonflies. I searched the Web for information and images about dragonflies. I spotted a photo of a Tau Emerald (*Hemicordulia tau*) that looked similar. But, after I posted this, I saw many Tau Emerald photos that look completely different. Also, most of the ones I saw are in Australia, and none are in my area. So, I'll keep looking. Maybe, a dragonfly expert out there can help me out. It was about 2" long, with a slightly wider wingspan. The mesh on its wings is so intricate and delicate. All of the dragonflies that I've seen in our yard have four stigmata (plural of stigma), on the front edges of their wings -- perhaps, that's characteristic of dragonflies in general. I just used my little Canon A650 on this one, as I often do for macro shots. It seems to do a decent job -- provided that the photographer chooses the right vantage point and lighting.

Gary Tyson identified this dragonfly as a female Blue Dasher. Thanks, Gary! Posted on 2008-08-16.

## Monarch Butterfly on Coneflower



This is my second posting. My first was yesterday. I have admired all of the wonderful photos on TrekNature for a long time. But, I had never joined until last Friday evening. I hope that my contributions can add a little to the great collection of comments and photos that comprise TrekNature.

I decided to post a butterfly shot this time. I took it two years ago in front of our house in Mystic, CT. I had not often seen a Monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*) on our purple coneflowers. But, I just happened to see one late in the day on July 31, 2006. Quite often, I see Monarchs on our butterfly bushes, but rarely on the coneflowers. This one paused just long enough for me to snap its picture. Posted on 2008-08-17.

## Tiger Swallowtail



I was fortunate to see a Tiger Swallowtail butterfly (*Papilio glaucus*) on a butterfly bush in front of our house, just after noon today. These butterflies are a little larger than Monarchs. Whereas a Monarch has a wingspan from 2 3/4 to 4 inches, the wingspan of the Tiger Swallowtail can be 3 1/2 to 6 3/4 inches (from a "Pocket Guide to Butterflies & Moths", by Elizabeth Balmer). The first part of their popular name comes from their yellow wings with black stripes. Posted on 2008-08-18.

## American Goldfinch



The picture I have posted is of a male American Goldfinch (*Carduelis tristis*). The females are not yellow; they're sort of olive-colored with no black on their heads. Goldfinches are slightly smaller than sparrows. Both the males and females have wonderful white markings on their neatly folded black wings, when they are viewed from behind.

I had never seen a goldfinch before we started feeding them in our yard several years ago. We use Nyjer (a.k.a. niger or thistle) seed in tubes with perches. Goldfinches like to fly with a kind of wavy flight path. They visit the nearby trees whenever there appears to be some danger. After they have perched in a tree, and have decided that they would like some more seed, they fly back to our tubes -- or they go somewhere else. Posted on 2008-08-20.

## Red-spotted Purple



I was reluctant to post this shot, because it has a couple of obvious deficiencies. However, it does serve as a record of this butterfly's visit to our yard.

Initially, I thought that it might be a female Black Tiger Swallowtail. However, I had not seen any other photos that showed markings exactly like those on this butterfly. In particular, I noticed the double lines along the bottom of the wings -- unlike any Swallowtail's markings. There are no tails also. There are more reddish spots along the upper portion of the wings than I had ever seen too. With any luck, this butterfly will visit again. Hopefully, I will be better prepared the next time.

In his critique, Ivan (Argus) has identified the butterfly as a Red-spotted Purple (*Limenitis artemis*). I did some searching, and for the first time saw other butterflies with similar coloring and markings to the one I posted. Thank you, Ivan! I've renamed my photo accordingly.

I looked for another image on the Internet that shows the red and blue dots along the bottom of the wings. I've seen markings that are very close in other photos of the Red-spotted Purple, but nothing that is exactly the same as the one I posted. I suppose that's asking for too much to find one that's identical. Posted on 2008-08-22.

## Blue Jay in a Rose Bush



It was Nov. 4/06, and I was by our garden shed, reasonably out of sight of any bird that might happen by. I didn't hear the warning cry that Blue Jays normally provide. But, suddenly, there one was, in our rose bush, about 10 feet from me. I managed to get one picture, which I have just posted.

For those of you who are not Blue Jay experts, I have made a few observations, which I hope that you find interesting. If you try to look up the name of this bird under "B", in such references as the Audubon Society's "Field Guide to North American Birds", or Sibley's "Guide to Birds", you will not find it listed. The reason is that there are many species of jays, with different modifiers. There are green, gray, brown, as well as blue ones. There are also several other species, which don't include a color in their names: e.g., Stellar's Jay, Mexican Jay and Scrub Jay.

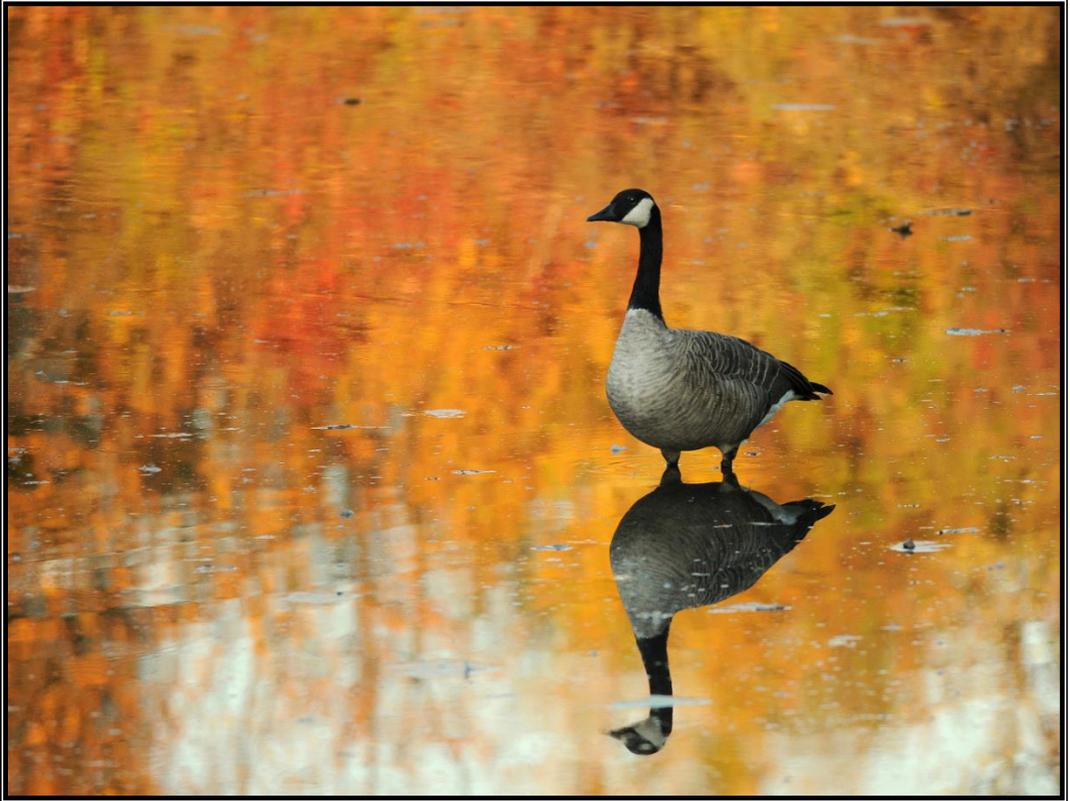
Photos of Blue Jays usually show the bird with a crest. I have found that they may or may not be displaying crests, depending on whether they are alert or agitated. Generally, when a Blue Jay announces itself, with its raucous cry, it lands with its crest quite perked up. Then, if there seems to be no danger, the crest relaxes. In the case of the Blue Jay that I have shown, there was no cry, so there was no evident agitation, and therefore

no crest was being displayed.

The largest jay listed in Sibley's is the Brown Jay (*Cyanocorax morio*). It is said to be 16.5" in length, with a wingspan of 26". The same source states that the Blue Jay (*Cyanocitta cristata*) is 11" in length, with a wingspan of 16". The Brown Jay, as well as several other jays, are not shown in Sibley's or the Audubon guide with a crest. The crest is evidently one of the identifying characteristics of the Genus *Cyanocitta*, which includes as its members the Blue Jay and the Stellar's Jay.

Thanks for looking! I hope that you feel I've made a worthy contribution to our gallery, and I appreciate your comments! Posted on 2008-08-24.

## Canada Goose Filler Photo



I took this shot at the Inglewood Bird Sanctuary in Calgary. It was late September, 2011, and the reflections on the water were very colourful. I was just leaving for the day; I spotted a goose standing all alone in the midst of the reflections.

## American Painted Lady



At first glance, one might be tempted to identify this butterfly as a Red Admiral. However, it is really an American Painted Lady (*Vanessa virginiensis*). Other names are Hunter's Butterfly and Virginia Lady (from the Audubon "Field Guide to Butterflies"). It is a small, very colorful butterfly, about one-half the size of a Monarch.

I took this shot about a week ago. I was quite surprised at the complexity of the pattern on the outside of this butterfly's wings. Because my photo shows both the outside and much of the inside, it is easier to make an identification than with just one view. I think that it makes quite a pleasing shot to see both views also.

The nectar in our butterfly bush blossoms is not very plentiful at this point. So, very few butterflies come by. I'm glad that the American Painted Lady decided to pay us a visit before the end of the season.

I hope that you like my photo, and I look forward to your comments.  
Posted on 2008-08-26.

## Northern Mockingbird



I took this shot in April/2006, in Mystic, CT. It is a Northern Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*). Many mornings and evenings, between spring and fall, these birds can be heard singing away outside of our house. According to Stokes' "Field Guide to Birds", the male "sings and defends a breeding territory" in the spring. And, in the fall, both the male and female "sing and defend a feeding territory". Many species of songbirds visit our area, and we are entertained with very pretty songs. But, the virtuosity and repertoire of the Mockingbird are quite fantastic. The Mockingbird is also very aggressive. It will take on other birds, even those larger than itself, as well as any animal it views to be a threat. In the photo I've submitted, it's almost as though this feisty bird is saying, "Go ahead, make my day!" Posted on 2008-08-30.

## Eastern Cottontail



I spotted this bunny (probably, an Eastern Cottontail or *Sylvilagus floridanus*) in the early evening yesterday. It was by the large rock outcropping in our yard in Mystic. We live across from a wooded area. As a result, we get various animal visitors from time to time. I was able to get a couple of shots while the bunny hopped around the rock. It was dark there, however, and I didn't want to use a flash, because it makes their eyes look unrealistic. When it decided to move out to the lawn, I was able to get a better picture. Although I have taken shots in the past that were sharper, I like this one because it shows off the cottontail on the Cottontail. It was only a matter of seconds after I took this photo that the bunny hopped across the road and into the woods. Posted on 2008-08-31.

## Goldfinch on Coneflower



The paragraph below appears in

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American\\_Goldfinch](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Goldfinch):

The American Goldfinch (*Carduelis tristis*), also known as the Eastern Goldfinch and Wild Canary, is a North American bird in the finch family. It is migratory, ranging from southern Canada to North Carolina during the breeding season, and from just south of the Canadian border to Mexico during the winter.

The Wikipedia article goes on to say the following:

The American Goldfinch are granivores and adapted for the consumption of seedheads, with a conical beak to remove the seeds and agile feet to grip the stems of seedheads while feeding.

To illustrate the above adaptation, yesterday, I spotted two goldfinches pecking at the Purple Coneflowers (*Echinacea purpurea*) in front of our house in Mystic. They had pushed their well-clawed feet deeply into the center of the spent flowers, and were bending over so that they could harvest the seeds. Goldfinches are sufficiently light so that the stems will support this activity. As far as butterflies and bees are concerned, the coneflowers can no longer offer them anything. But, for goldfinches, they

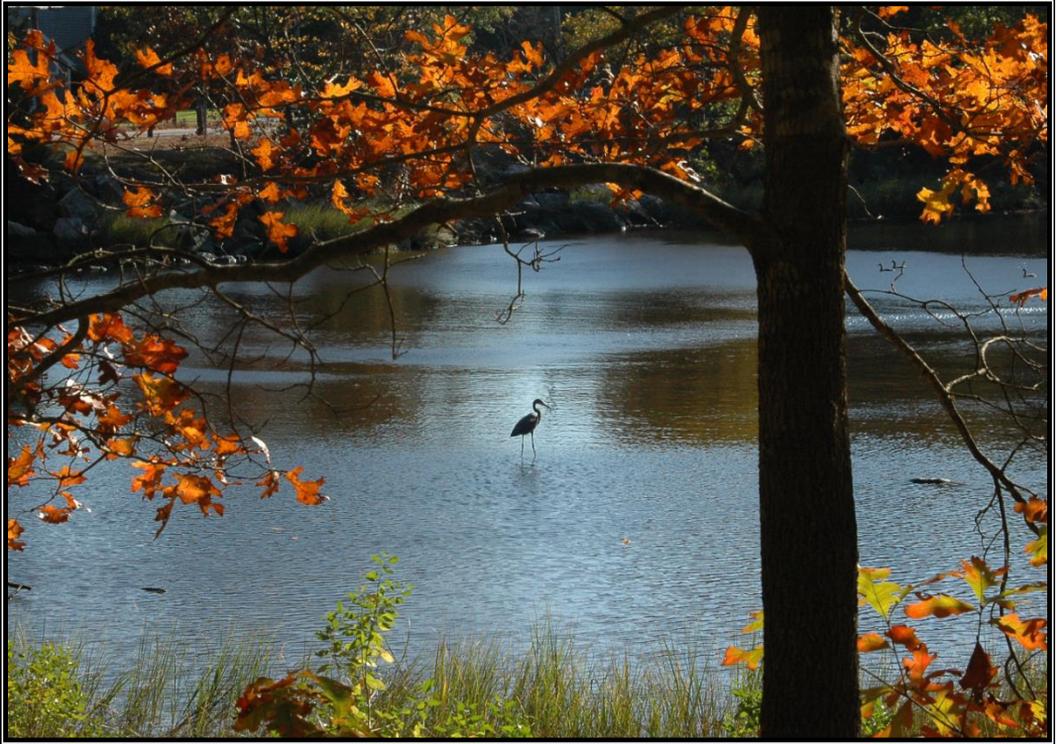
offer new food at the end of the summer. I crept up toward them as carefully and as quietly as I could. One of the goldfinches flew off immediately when he saw me. The other one, however, was OK with my being there - presumably, as long as I didn't get any closer. I readied my camera and took a few shots. A tripod would not have been possible to set up, so I had to hand-hold my D70 with its 28-300mm non-stabilized lens. However, I had previously set the ISO to as high as I dared, 400, and I was able to set both the shutter speed and aperture acceptably for the maximum zoom of my lens. The shot I selected shows the back of the goldfinch, as well as the head, quite well. He has seeds on his beak still after his breakfast. In fact, virtually all of my shots show seeds on his beak. He was clearly enjoying himself! Posted on 2008-09-01.

## Black-crowned Night-Heron Filler Photo



I took this photo at Frank Lake in June, 2012. The time was in the early evening, when they like to fly to another part of the lake region to see what they might find. Night-herons prey on small fish and other creatures—including small shorebirds.

## Heron at Beebe Pond



A Great Blue Heron waits for any sign of motion in Beebe (pronounced beebee) Pond. It was a pleasant afternoon in October, and the fall colors were showing their brilliance. On the right side of the photo are three swimming cormorants. They had been on rocks earlier. But, when I arrived at the pond, they decided to take to the water.

Beebe Pond is in Beebe Pond Park, which is a 95-acre parcel of land in Connecticut, at the corner of Fishtown Road and Noank Road, about half way between the towns of Noank and Mystic. Beebe Cove is nearby, just off Long Island Sound, an estuary of the Atlantic Ocean. The pond and cove are named after Captain Silas Beebe, who apparently used the pond in the winter to provide ice for his family (from the Indian and Colonial Research Center Library at

<http://www.theicrc.org/vewebsite/exhibit1/e10975a.htm>).

Posted on 2008-09-04.

## Halloween Pennant Dragonfly



I used Photoshop Elements to tone down the background of this photo a little, by reducing the saturation. Then, I sharpened it a little and touched up the contrast. Although the background is busy, I like this image because I think that it shows off the dragonfly quite well.

My best guess as to the identification of this dragonfly is that it is a female Halloween Pennant (*Celithemis eponina*). I have to rely on the Internet for my information, since I don't yet have a dragonfly book. The dragonfly might be a Banded Pennant. It might be some other species of Pennant also.

I have provided links below to some of the information I ran across. The closest image I found, to the one I have posted, is one that appears in reference #1:

1. Info and photo on Halloween Pennant *Celithemis eponina*:

<http://www.photomigrations.com/articles/0608300.htm>

Quote from that site:

“This is the largest, most widely distributed, and perhaps most colorful small pennant species in the region. Its common name is descriptive because of its distinctive orange and brown or black wings.”

2. Info on Banded Pennant *Celithemis fasciata*:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Banded\\_Pennant](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Banded_Pennant)

3. Photo of a Calico Pennant *Celithemis elisa*:

<http://www.cirrusimage.com/dragonflies.htm>

4. Info on Halloween Pennant:

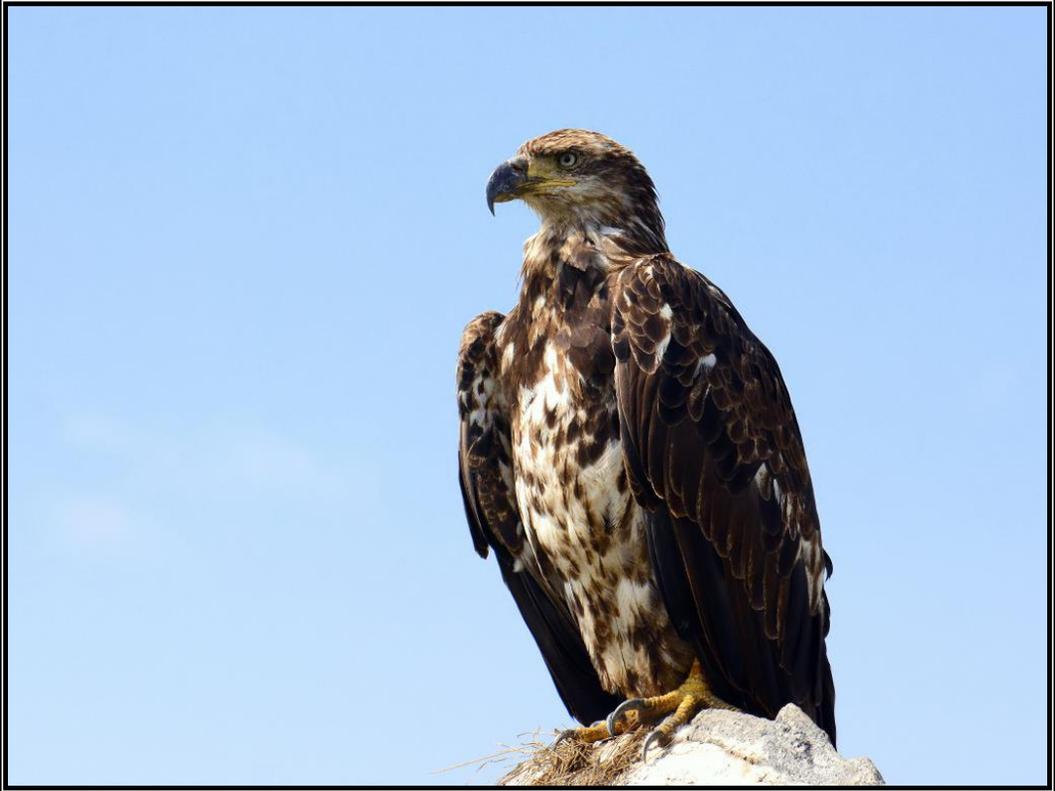
<http://bugguide.net/node/view/2591>

I hope that you like the image. I would appreciate it very much if someone could confirm the identification of this dragonfly. Thanks.

It's clear to me now that this dragonfly is indeed a Halloween Pennant.

Posted on 2008-09-06.

## Juvenile Bald Eagle Filler Photo



I've only seen a Bald Eagle at Frank Lake once. It was in August, 2014. I was surprised to find this bird perched on top of the big rock just north of the observation blind. I think that it's a juvenile about 3-4 years old.

## White-tailed Jackrabbit



I took this photo of a White-tailed Jackrabbit (*Lepus townsendii*) just outside a seniors' lodge in Calgary, Alberta, a Canadian city with a population of about one million people. I was visiting a relative at the lodge. Luckily, I had my old Canon A630 (since replaced by a Canon A650 IS) on my belt, and I was able to quickly roll down the car window and get two shots. I was surprised to see the jackrabbit at a location that is so near to the downtown core (about 1-2 miles away). I was particularly amazed to see how alert the animal looked in my photo. Even though the jackrabbit was about 30 feet away, its eye appeared to be more vivid than the eye of any other creature that I've ever photographed at that distance with my little Canon camera.

I found much interesting information about these jackrabbits (they're actually hares, not rabbits) at the following site:

[http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/site/accounts/information/Lepus\\_townsendii.html](http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/site/accounts/information/Lepus_townsendii.html)

I found a Wikipedia article that notes the differences between a hare and a rabbit: "Hares do not bear their young below ground in a burrow as do other leporids, but rather in a shallow depression or flattened nest of grass called a form. Hares are adapted to the lack of physical protection,

relative to that afforded by a burrow, by being born fully furred and with eyes open. They are hence able to fend for themselves very quickly after birth — that is to say, they are precocial. By contrast, the related rabbits and cottontail rabbits are altricial, having young that are born blind and hairless." Posted on 2008-09-13.

## Black-billed Magpie Filler Photo



I took this photo of a Black-billed Magpie, flying along the Bow River, at the Inglewood Bird Sanctuary in April, 2013. That was about two months before the disastrous flood in 2013. The sanctuary has yet to recover from that calamity. The last word I had was that it would not be open again until late summer of 2016.

## A Peaceful Scene



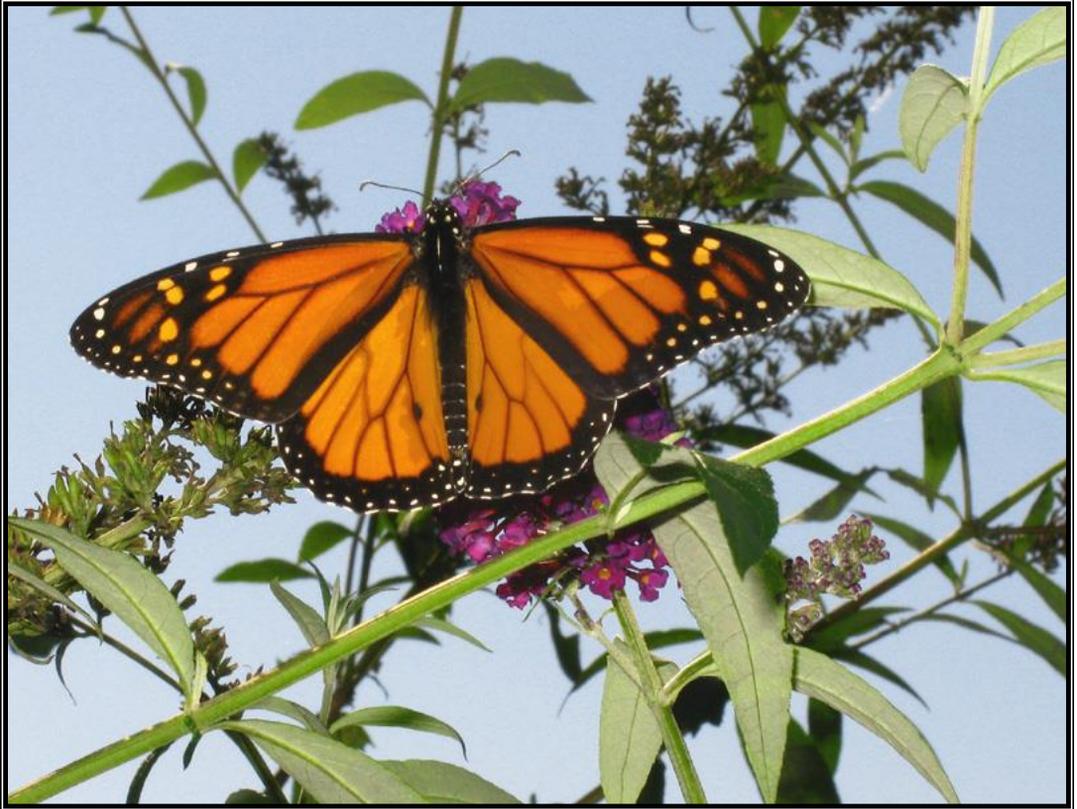
There's a small body of water by Thomas Road, just past the Groton-New London Airport in Groton, CT. It is north of Baker Cove, a sheltered inlet off the mouth of the Thames River and Long Island Sound. It's a pretty place that I pass when I go to work. In the evening, the water is usually very still. I decided to take a picture, through the tall grass on either side of an access path, toward the water and trees. Posted on 2008-09-14.

## Sunset at Groton Long Point



Off to the right, as one enters Groton Long Point, CT, there's a large cove. I went there in the early evening two days ago to see if I could spot an egret that is sometimes standing on a rock. He wasn't there that evening. I noticed that the sun was rapidly sinking over the wooded area on the left of the photo. I only had my long zoom on my Nikon DSLR, so I got out my little Canon camera, which has somewhat of a wide angle, and took a few shots when the time seemed right. In the photo I've posted, the center of the image is glowing from the sunset behind the wooded area. The reddish-orange color was undoubtedly behind the woods also, but it could not be seen since it was so low to the horizon. The poles on the right of the photo are holding the electric cables for the trains that travel between New York and Boston. I made the shot from behind a couple of interesting looking trees. I hoped that their leaves and branches would stand out well against the blue sky and the calm water. Posted on 2008-09-19.

## Monarch Snowbird



A Monarch (*Danaus plexippus*) butterfly visited our butterfly bush this afternoon. I could tell by the two black dots on the lower portion of his wings that he is a male. He had to share the few remaining blossoms with a couple of bumble bees.

This Monarch, and millions of others of his species, are heading south, as far as 2,000 miles; it is for this reason that I decided to rename my photo "Monarch Snowbird" -- I had originally named it "Monarch Butterfly". Unfortunately, these warm weather-seeking "snowbirds" probably won't be able to make the return trip north like birds or retired people. However, their offspring will do that. So, for those of us in TN who remain in the north, we'll again be able to see and photograph these very colorful creatures next spring and summer.

I've found that Monarchs like to land on blossoms and flex their wings. Then, they usually close them and start drinking the nectar of the blossom they selected. They usually move around the blossom a bit as they sample the juice. I've never been able to predict when a Monarch will open its wings fully. I just have to take a few shots and hope that one of them will show the full wingspread. Today, I was fortunate to have pressed the shutter release just after the Monarch opened his wings.

Here are a few links that have quite a bit of information about the

Monarch:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monarch\\_butterfly](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monarch_butterfly)

<http://www.monarch-butterfly.com/>

<http://www.monarchwatch.org/>

<http://www.nhptv.org/Natureworks/monarch.htm>

Posted on 2008-09-21.

## Bank Swallows Filler Photo



In the spring there are usually swallows using the nesting boxes on the way to Frank Lake. I saw these two in May, 2013. They look like they're having a serious discussion about something. Perhaps, the one on the left committed a transgression of some sort.

## Skipper on Coneflower



I took this photo earlier this summer. It shows a skipper butterfly trying to get a little nectar from a coneflower.

When I first saw a skipper, several years ago, I thought that it was a moth. However, they are really small butterflies. The “Field Guide to New England”, by the National Audubon Society, describes the differences between moths and butterflies: “Moths’ antennae are either feather-like or wiry, and lack the clubbed tip of butterflies’ antennae. Moths rest with their wings outstretched, folded, or at an angle above the body; butterflies rest with their wings outstretched or held together vertically, like a sail. Moths can fly day and night, while butterflies fly only by day.” That being said, and just to confuse things a little, the “Field Guide to Butterflies”, also by the National Audubon Society, states that Folded-winged Skippers: “somewhat resemble moths, with their small, triangular wings and flat, hairy bodies. When basking in the sun, they hold their fore wings and hind wings at different angles rather like folded paper airplanes.”

The first indication I had that this skipper might be a Folded-winged Skipper, and more specifically a Crossline Skipper (*Polites origenes*), came from the second Audubon guide referenced above. The coloring, body and range certainly look right. However, the markings, with dots on

the upper wings, appear to be different in the skipper I have presented. The female of the species has more subdued dots, but they have reduced coloring too, as compared to the male. Another possibility, according to the Audubon butterflies guide, is the Tawny-edged Skipper (*Polites themistocles*). If anyone out there is able to provide a more definitive identification, I would be most appreciative.

I found additional, very useful and interesting information about skippers at: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Skipper\\_\(butterfly\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Skipper_(butterfly)).

If you wish to read about coneflowers, specifically Purple Coneflowers (*Echinacea purpurea*), the following URL provides helpful information: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Echinacea\\_purpurea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Echinacea_purpurea).

Posted on 2008-09-27.

## Goose Friends Filler Photo



I've always liked this shot. It shows two Snow Geese and a Canada Goose at Frank Lake. I took it in April, 2012. Unlike Canada Geese, Snow Geese don't nest at Frank Lake. I've seen the species hanging out together many times as the Snow Geese pass through on their way north.

## White M Hairstreak



I've been away from TrekNature for a couple of weeks. That doesn't mean that I stopped taking pictures however! I was just doing other things.

Last Sunday, I went to the Holdridge Nursery in Ledyard, CT. They had promised to release about 100 Monarch butterflies, and it seemed like a good photo opportunity. I did take a number of shots of Monarchs. But, another, much smaller butterfly intrigued me. It never opened its wings while I followed it around some yellow flowers (dahlias, perhaps). I noticed some odd features, like it seemed to be dragging something. In fact, this tiny 1" butterfly, which I later identified as the quite uncommon White M Hairstreak or *Parrhasius m-album*, has two little tails. Those tails, and a false eye, which can't be seen well in my photo, could confuse a predator into thinking that the butterfly's head is at its back (see [http://creatures.ifas.ufl.edu/bfly/white\\_m\\_hairstreak.htm](http://creatures.ifas.ufl.edu/bfly/white_m_hairstreak.htm)). The butterfly was moving around quite rapidly, but I managed to get a couple of reasonable shots. As I learned later, if it had opened its wings, I would have seen an iridescent blue.

Where did its name come from? The "White M" refers to a very distinctive "M" (or "W", depending on how you're looking at it), displayed in white and black on the bottom of the wing, by the red dot. "Hairstreak" comes from the thin white lines or streaks that mark the wings.

Some additional URLs that provide more information about these distinctive, skipper-sized butterflies are as follows:

[http://www.floridata.com/tracks/butterfly/white\\_m\\_hairstreak.cfm](http://www.floridata.com/tracks/butterfly/white_m_hairstreak.cfm)

<http://www.butterfliesandmoths.org/species?l=1552>

<http://www.duke.edu/~jspippen/butterflies/whitemhairstreak.htm>

Posted on 2008-10-14.

## Common Merganser and Ducklings Filler Photo



I spotted this mother merganser and her little ones on a log in the Inglewood Bird Sanctuary. It was June, 2012. She wanted to lead her ducklings to another part of the pond. When she stood up and flapped her wings, they all jumped into the water; but she didn't leave. She rounded them up and came back to the log. Then they left in a more orderly fashion—mostly, riding on her back.

## Fall Colors at Hallville Pond



There is a slender body of water, which stretches along Route 2A, on the way to Norwich from Ledyard, Connecticut. It is called Hallville Pond. I don't think it's more than about 200 feet wide, and one mile or so long. My wife and I went for a drive last Saturday to see if we could find some pretty fall foliage. We would have gone right past Hallville Pond, had it not been for the colorful reflections that we saw from our car, in the very still water beside the road. We parked as soon as possible at the north end of the pond. The lighting could have been a little better, but it still looked quite attractive. Initially, I took a shot of the trees on the right bank of the pond, since they appeared to be closer to peak colors than those on the left. Then, I noticed the wonderful reflections of the trees on both of the banks, seemingly all of the way down the length of the pond. I took a few photos, and I have selected one of them for my posting today. Posted on 2008-10-16.

## Black Saddlebags Dragonfly



I didn't post any of my photos of this dragonfly, because I had difficulty identifying it. I hadn't retried my identification surfing (I don't yet have a good dragonfly book) for several weeks. Today, I was able to go right to the ID. The Latin name is *Tramea lacerata* and the popular name is Black Saddlebags. The "saddlebags" refers to the hind wing coloration, making it appear as though this species is wearing saddlebags. They are about 2" long, so they are quite impressive to see up close. The link that I came across that supplied me with its name and photo is:

<http://stephenville.tamu.edu/~fmitchel/dragonfly/Libellulidae/>.

For those who wish to know more about the area I visited, which has been a favorite place of mine to go to, ever since I lived there about 10 years ago, here are two links:

[http://www.stoningtonboroughct.com/our\\_village.shtml](http://www.stoningtonboroughct.com/our_village.shtml)

<http://www.stoningtonct.com/row.html>

The last one describes the specific site of my Black Saddlebags encounter. It's a very pretty place with many wild flowers, grasses and large insect and bird populations. There's water all along one side, and sometimes it

gets so marshy that it's hard to venture very far into the conservancy area. A sheltered portion of the Atlantic Ocean, called Long Island Sound, washes against the rocky banks.

I hope that you enjoy viewing my dragonfly. And, visit the Stonington Borough, if you find yourself in the southeastern corner of Connecticut - but, don't tell anyone I told you, because shhh, it's a secret place. Posted on 2008-10-18.

## Canada Geese with Goslings Filler Photo



How many adult geese does it take to babysit 50 goslings? In this case, it took 6. In June, 2014 I spotted this extended family at Frank Lake on the west side. All of the goslings were strung out in a line. The adults decided that they should swim east, so the goslings were bunched up.

## November Foliage Colors at Beebe Pond



One of my favorite places to visit at any time of the year is Beebe Pond, in southeastern Connecticut. Driving from Noank to Mystic on Route 215 (also called Elm Street/Noank Road), one sees Beebe Cove on the right, and the much smaller Beebe Pond on the left. Beebe Pond is surrounded by woods, containing many varieties of trees and bushes. Many visitors are attracted to the adjacent hiking trails of Beebe Pond Park.

The many different kinds of trees and shrubs around Beebe Pond display brilliant fall colors, which sometimes last until November. The photo I have posted is from November 1, late in the afternoon. The prominent red, pink and gold colored leaves in the foreground are on maple trees. There are rust and purplish leaves in the background, which are from oaks and dogwoods, and possibly others. I am unsure about the pink leaves on the left; at first, I thought that they were sumac, but the more I looked at them, the less I thought that was the case. The green trees at the left edge of the shot are cedars. The sprinkling of gold and green in the background are from various trees. From the leaves on the ground, clearly many leaves had fallen already. But, those that were left were putting on quite a show! Posted on 2008-11-04.

## Close-up of Ruby Meadowhawk



I took this shot of a dragonfly in front of our house in Mystic, Connecticut, in early September. I found it perched on a leaf on one of our bushes. It is difficult to know for sure, but the species is probably a Ruby Meadowhawk (*Sympetrum rubicundulum*). Although, it's possible that it might be a Cherry-faced Meadowhawk, or even a White-faced Meadowhawk - the differences among them are very subtle. Since females of those species are beige, instead of red, this dragonfly is probably a female. Of course, it could also be a juvenile male, because they are beige also.

I took the photo with ISO set to 100, and shutter speed set to 1/160. My DOF was quite shallow due to the f/4 I used. In PP, I sharpened (in PS Elements), reduced the noise (using Neat Image), and cropped it as close as I dared, because I wanted to display the features of the Meadowhawk's head, thorax and legs.

I found two URLs, which provide information on the spectacular eyes of dragonflies:

[http://www.geocities.com/brisbane\\_insects/DragonflyHead.htm](http://www.geocities.com/brisbane_insects/DragonflyHead.htm)

[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Image:Dragonfly\\_eye\\_3811.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Image:Dragonfly_eye_3811.jpg)

Posted on 2008-11-08.

## Ring-necked Pheasant



Yesterday, I spotted a male Ring-necked Pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*) on a grain farm south of Calgary. I managed to get one quick photo before he turned and headed for some bushes. He's the most colorful bird that I have ever seen in the wild - if a farm can be called that. These birds are not native to North America. I understand that they originated in China and other Asian countries. They were introduced unsuccessfully in New York in the 1700s, and to Oregon in 1882, as birds to be bred as game birds (see <http://adventure.howstuffworks.com/outdoor-activities/hunting/clubs-and-organizations/pheasants-forever.htm/printable>). The Ring-necked Pheasant has become so popular with hunters in South Dakota, that it was named their state bird. Personally, I prefer to just look at these birds -- and to take pictures, of course.

The sites below contain some information that I thought TN members and others might find interesting about the Ring-necked Pheasant:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Common\\_Pheasant](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Common_Pheasant)

<http://www.srd.gov.ab.ca/fishwildlife/livingwith/huntingalberta/pheasant.aspx>

Posted on 2009-05-22.

## Ring-necked Pheasant Hen



I found this Ring-necked Pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*) hen near the cock that I posted yesterday. She was in some brown and green grass that gave her very good camouflage. I almost walked right past her. As I said yesterday in my posting, my location was a grain farm in southern Alberta. As with her mate, the hen didn't wait around after she saw me. I managed to get a couple of shots before she was gone.

From <http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/birds/ring-necked-pheasant.html>:

Males (also known as "cocks") establish harems of hens—as many as a dozen female birds. Each spring a male delineates and defends his territory and his harem from aggressive rivals. Such encounters can lead to vicious battles.

The birds prefer fields and farmlands with brushy cover, though they also inhabit woodland undergrowth and some wetlands. Females nest in fields or in border habitat and lay a dozen or more eggs, which they incubate with no help from the cock. Young pheasants grow up quickly and can fly within two weeks. They will remain with their mother for six or seven weeks. Many pheasant eggs are destroyed by predators or by humans (particularly in farm country), and young birds also have a high

mortality rate.

In autumn, ring-necked pheasants form flocks in which they will live until the following spring.

These birds are most comfortable on the ground, where they forage for grains, seeds, berries, insects, and, occasionally, small animals. They can fly and launch themselves airborne with an abrupt, noisy takeoff, but typically run from trouble. Pheasant flights are merely short-distance dashes for cover. Posted on 2009-05-23.

## Dark-eyed Junco Filler Photo



This male Dark-eyed Junco was on our lawn in the backyard in April, 2011. We get them every year, but they don't usually stay very long. They spend a lot of time on the ground foraging.

## Kildeer



I was walking around in a local wetlands area two days ago, in Okotoks, Alberta, in the late afternoon. I heard piercing cries coming from the water's edge on one side of a pond. As I got closer, the cries became louder, and seemingly, more insistent. There was a small bird standing there looking at me. I recognized it later as a Killdeer. It was making loud "kill-dee, kill-dee" calls. I was able to get quite close to the bird, and managed to get several good shots.

I have pasted below some information about the Killdeer, which I obtained from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Killdeer>:

The killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*) is a medium-sized plover. Adults have a brown back and wings, a white belly, and a white breast with two black bands. The rump is tawny orange. The face and cap are brown with a white forehead. They have an orange-red eyering. The chicks are patterned almost identically to the adults, and are precocial — able to move around right after hatching. The killdeer frequently uses a "broken wing act" to distract predators from the nest.

In addition to Wikipedia, I found the following additional sources of information about the Killdeer:

[http://www.birdweb.org/birdweb/bird\\_details.aspx?id=145](http://www.birdweb.org/birdweb/bird_details.aspx?id=145)

<http://www.birdwatching.com/stories/killdeer.html>

<http://www.stanleyparkeecology.ca/programs/conservation/urbanWildlife/naturalHistory/killdeer.php>

By the way, for those who are interested, here is the missing Exif data on the shot, since it got lost with my use of Neat Image: ISO 1000, 300mm (effectively, 450mm), and 6:07pm. I was using a Nikon 70-300 VR lens. Posted on 2009-06-05.

## Wilson's Snipe Filler Photo



I hadn't seen this bird before at Red Deer Lake. In fact, I had never identified one anywhere before this instance. I took this photo in October, 2011. The snipe moved so quickly that I only had time to take a couple of shots.

## Blue-winged Teals



Blue-winged Teals are often found in freshwater ponds and marshes. I encountered the pair in my photo as I was walking around the edge of Red Deer Lake, in Lloyd Park – a small park just south of Hwy. 22X in Calgary, Alberta. The lake is a very marshy area, which is probably a mile or so across. Many bird species are there at this time of the year. I saw these male and female ducks standing on a log at one end of the lake. The male is on the right. The shot I selected is kind of cute, I thought. The ducks look like they're admiring themselves in the water – perhaps, to see if they are presentable enough to go out for dinner. :)

My iBird Explorer Canada iPod touch application is the reference I used in order to identify the ducks. That app gives the Latin name as *Anas discors*. The range of the ducks is said to be across most of the U.S. and much of Canada, even extending up to Alaska. They are typically 15-17 inches in length and weigh just under one pound. They are not a large duck; a large male Mallard could be about twice the size of one of the larger male Blue-winged Teals. They are more vocal than most ducks, making a high-pitched “tsee tsee”, and a nasal quacking. Apparently, according to iBird Explorer, “Blue-winged Teals have the highest annual mortality rate (reaching 65%) of all of the dabbling ducks, possibly as a result of hunting and long over-ocean migration.” It's a good thing that there are lots of them – about 4,600,000, according to

<http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/species/index.html?action=SpcHTMLDetails.asp&sid=443>.

Three other URLs with interesting information on Blue-winged Teals are:

<http://www.deltawaterfowl.org/research/bios/bwteal.php>

[http://www.birdweb.org/birdweb/bird\\_details.aspx?id=69](http://www.birdweb.org/birdweb/bird_details.aspx?id=69)

[http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Blue-winged\\_Teal/lifehistory](http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Blue-winged_Teal/lifehistory)

Posted on 2009-06-09.

## Pine Siskin Filler Photo



I took this photo in September, 2010, in our backyard. We haven't seen any of these birds this year (2015). Hopefully, we will soon. They're about the same size as an American Goldfinch.

## Young Franklin's Gull



It's a tough introduction to life for a young Franklin's Gull (*Larus pipixcan*). I found this one, and many others, wandering on the shore of Red Deer Lake, which is located in Lloyd Park near Calgary, Alberta (I'm not sure where the city boundary is, so the park might be within the city). Lloyd Park is just off Hwy. 22X, to the west of the Spruce Meadows equestrian complex.

This gull is likely around one month old, since it cannot yet fly. It, and the other young gulls at the lake seem to have a very hazardous existence for the first part of their lives. Even though they can swim, they cannot fly more than a few feet. Their worst deficiency is that they have not yet learned to be very wary of possible dangers. Therefore, hawks and other predators evidently find them to be easy pickings. Looking around the lake shore, one sees a great number of feathers and bird carcasses. Of course, magpies and crows take full advantage of this situation.

The gull in my photo allowed me to get about eight feet from it. Whereas, the adult gulls wouldn't permit me to get within about 50 feet of them. It's an interesting experience walking along the shore, with the young chicks strolling around, and the adult gulls diving and squawking. I tried to get a few pictures of the young ones as quickly as I could, so that I didn't cause too much excitement. Posted on 2009-07-18.

## Great Blue Heron



This Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*) was standing on the shore just off Hwy. 17, near the Tsawwassen Ferry Terminal in BC, south of Vancouver. Presumably, he was just about to resume his fishing activity, or he had had his fill for the day.

Excerpts from three of the sites I found with information on the Great Blue Heron are as follows:

<http://www.pwlf.org/gbh.htm>:

The Great Blue Heron is a widespread year round resident of the Pacific Coast of North America. It lives along the seashore from southern Alaska to Baja California and across North America from southern Canada to northern Mexico. Herons depart parts of Canada and northern United States that freeze in winter for the southern USA, Mexico, the Caribbean, Central America or northern South America.

About 10,000 herons reside along the Pacific Coast between Washington and Alaska. Many thousand likely reside along the coast of California and a few thousand probably live on the Oregon coast. The northwest coast subspecies has been most studied in recent years.

[http://www.birdweb.org/birdweb/bird\\_details.aspx?id=41:](http://www.birdweb.org/birdweb/bird_details.aspx?id=41)

The familiar Great Blue Heron is the largest heron in North America. It is a large bird, with a slate-gray body, chestnut and black accents, and very long legs and neck. In flight, it looks enormous, with a six-foot wingspan. Adults sport a shaggy ruff at the base of their necks. A black eyebrow extends back to black plumes emerging from the head. Juveniles have a dark crown with no plumes or ruff, and a mottled neck. In flight, a Great Blue Heron typically holds its head in toward its body with its neck bent.

[http://www.hww.ca/hww2.asp?cid=7&id=43:](http://www.hww.ca/hww2.asp?cid=7&id=43)

This bird gives the general impression of being tall and thin: its wings, neck, bill, and legs are long. The long limbs dictate the heron's movements: it flies with deep, slow wing beats, and on land, or in the water, it walks erect with long strides. In flight, the neck is doubled back, the head resting against the shoulders, and the long legs held straight behind

The top of the adult's head is white with a black stripe on each side extending from the yellow eyes to slender black plumes at the back of the head. Its back is greyish blue, and its breast is white streaked with black. Breeding herons have long plumes on their breasts, flanks, and backs.

The sexes look much alike, but the males are usually bigger than the females.

From birth to two years, Great Blue Herons moult, or replace old feathers with new, four times. During the first year, juveniles have grey crowns and grey wings flecked with brown, and they lack plumes. Adult Great Blue Herons show brighter colours during the breeding season, moult some plumes in summer, and change to duller colours in winter.

Great Blue Herons live long lives, some as long as 17 years. Posted on 2009-08-12.

## Synchronized Cranes



I saw these two Sandhill Cranes (*Grus canadensis*) at the George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary in Delta, BC in Canada. I thought that this photo was kind of cute, with them stepping out together. More information about the sanctuary can be found at:

<http://www.reifelbirdsantuary.com/>.

I wondered about the colouring of these cranes when I saw their orange plumage. Most of the photos I had seen showed them with grey feathers. Although, I did see some pictures with orange also. Information I found on the Web at <http://www.savingcranes.org/sandhillcrane.html>, has resolved this question. I've pasted below an excerpt from that site:

In many areas, wild Sandhills preen iron-rich mud into their feathers creating a deep rusty brown hue which lasts during spring and summer. As fall advances, these rusty feathers molt and the birds return to their grayish appearance. In some regions, however, iron-rich mud is absent and the birds appear grey all year.

Additional Note:

Thanks to Greg (greghume) for the idea, I have renamed my photo "Synchronized Cranes". Posted on 2009-08-13.

## Killdeer - in Flight



Yesterday, I visited one of my favourite bird watching sites, Frank Lake, Alberta. This is a protected wildlife area, just east of High River, off Hwy. 23. I saw two Killdeer birds near the access path to the observation building. I took a couple of photos while they were on the ground. Then, suddenly, in their typically noisy Killdeer fashion, they took to the air. I followed one of them with my camera, and was fortunate to obtain the shot I have posted today. It's the first decent shot I've been able to get of a Killdeer flying.

I've pasted below two excerpts of information about the Killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*):

<http://www.stanleyparkeecology.ca/programs/conservation/urbanWildlife/naturalHistory/killdeer.php>:

Did You Know?

- Killdeer get their name from the loud and frantic sound they make, which sounds something like "kill-deeah"
- Killdeer build their nests on gravel parking lots, shortgrass fields, and similar open areas
- Killdeer are strong fliers and swift runners
- Killdeer are very helpful, especially for farmers, because they feast on

pests

Characteristics:

- Killdeer are characterized by two black bands across their white chest and an orange-coloured lower back, rump, and tail
- From bill to tail adults measure approximately 23-28 cm and typically weigh up to 100g

Habitat:

- Although technically classified as shorebirds, it lives mainly in open areas, such as fields, pastures, and dry uplands
- The killdeer are very common across most of southern Canada; however are very rare in northern forested regions

[http://canadianbiodiversity.mcgill.ca/english/species/birds/birdpages/cha\\_voc.htm](http://canadianbiodiversity.mcgill.ca/english/species/birds/birdpages/cha_voc.htm):

Often found nesting in open meadows, rocky plains and beaches, the killdeer exhibits a highly adapted behavior to protect its nest. Like many other birds, the killdeer will feign a broken wing, leading an intruder away from its nest by creating a commotion, then miraculously "recover" and fly away. Killdeer lay four speckled eggs in their ground-level nest.

Other interesting sites:

<http://www.borealforest.org/world/birds/kildeer.htm>

[http://www.audubon.org/bird/BoA/F35\\_G1c.html](http://www.audubon.org/bird/BoA/F35_G1c.html)

<http://www.bird-friends.com/BirdPage.php?name=Killdeer>

Posted on 2009-08-18.

## Whooping Crane Close-up



I thought that members of TN might find this close-up of a Whooping Crane (*Grus americana*) interesting. As well, I thought that information on the Whooping Crane conservation projects might be welcomed. We almost lost this species, but now there are around 500 Whooping Cranes - - most living in the wild, in protected environments.

When I was at the Calgary Zoo a couple of days ago, I saw that two Whooping Cranes are in residence there. The Calgary Zoo is one of the facilities (see below) that provides eggs for the "Reintroduction Project" and "Operation Migration". Those projects are two of the conservation projects that have been successful in the hatching, raising, and migration of Whooping Cranes using ultralight airplanes.

I found this amazing YouTube video about Operation Migration:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bw\\_IYovvh5c](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bw_IYovvh5c).

Bill Lishman is one of the two people who started Operation Migration in 1994; the other person is Joe Duff. Mr. Lishman's home page is [http://www.williamlishman.com/flight\\_with\\_birds.htm](http://www.williamlishman.com/flight_with_birds.htm). He's the one who taught Canada Geese to fly behind an ultralight.

The Operation Migration URL is: <http://www.operationmigration.org/>.

From <http://www.bringbackthecranes.org/>:

The three primary captive breeding centers with whooping crane pairs that produce eggs for the reintroduction project are at Patuxent Wildlife Research Center (Maryland), the International Crane Foundation (Wisconsin), and the Calgary Zoo (Canada). Additional breeding pairs are also present at the San Antonio Zoo and the Audubon Center for Research of Endangered Species at the Audubon Species Survival Center in New Orleans, Louisiana.

See also [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whooping\\_Crane](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whooping_Crane), for more information about the Whooping Crane. Posted on 2009-08-25.

## Great Horned Owl Filler Photo



This owl looks about as startled to see me as I was to see it. It was October, 2010, and I was at the Inglewood Bird Sanctuary. The owl didn't seem to be inclined to go anywhere. It kept being disturbed by people coming by to see it. I was absolutely entranced by the eyes.

## Whooping Crane



Yesterday, I posted a portrait of this Whooping Crane (*Grus americana*) that I saw at the Calgary Zoo. I thought that you might like to see another photo showing the entire bird. They are quite spectacular when you're close to them, since they are the largest crane in North America. Their height is just under 5 feet, and their wingspan is almost 8 feet (from <http://web1.audubon.org/science/species/watchlist/profile.php?speciesCode=whocra>).

Janice (lovenature) brought a Whooping Crane link to my attention yesterday (thank you, Janice!) -- see her critique on yesterday's photo. The link talks about the migration of some Whooping Cranes, being guided by ultralight airplanes. They will travel from Wisconsin to Florida, and will begin on Sept. 4. There will be a CraneCam in operation beginning in October. Posted on 2009-08-26.

## Canada Geese at Wyndham-Carseland



I went to the Wyndham-Carseland Provincial Park, south of Calgary, yesterday (see <http://gateway.cd.gov.ab.ca/siteinformation.aspx?id=178> and [http://birdcomp.fanweb.ca/locations\\_Langdon.html](http://birdcomp.fanweb.ca/locations_Langdon.html) for more information about the park and the area). After I entered the park, I saw some birds across the river, but I couldn't get near them. Two regulars at the park told me that I could continue on Hwy. 24 to Carseland, go over the Bow River bridge, then turn left before the town. I did that. After a few miles of gravel, and after winding down a narrow dirt and gravel road for awhile, I came to the weir, which stretches across the Bow River. There I parked my car and continued on foot. It wasn't too far before I was able to see the birds that I had seen from the other side. These three Canada Geese, and several others, flew away when I was about 400 feet away from them.

I took about a dozen shots as the geese left. A few of my photos weren't bad, but I particularly like the one I posted, because it shows some of the fall colours from the park trees reflecting on the water, as well as the separated wing tips of all three of the geese. I learned from <http://www.people.eku.edu/ritchisong/554notes3.html> that, when a Canada Goose is flying, the up stroke of its wings is called the "recovery stroke". During that motion, the wing tips separate, so that the air can more easily pass through the wings. Then, the bird begins the downward

and forward "power stroke" with the wing tips closed again. Thus, a Canada Goose is able to develop thrust for its flight.

I hope that you enjoy this shot of Canada Geese in flight at Wyndham-Carseland Provincial Park. Posted on 2009-09-23.

## Western Meadowlark Filler Photo



It was May, 2013 when I saw this meadowlark at Frank Lake. The only other time that I had seen a meadowlark at that location was in May, 2012; I wasn't able to get a good photo at that time. However, this time the bird posed photogenically on a fencepost, while singing beautifully.

## Swainson's Thrush



I'm looking forward to spring, so I thought that I'd post a photo from last year. This is a shot of a species that I had never photographed before. I was in a small wooded area south of Calgary in May/09. Although I didn't recognize the bird at the time, I've since identified it as a Swainson's Thrush (*Catharus ustulatus*). This bird's name comes from an English ornithologist named William Swainson, according to the iBird Explorer Canada app on my iPod. It has also been called the Olive-backed Thrush. The Hermit Thrush (*Catharus guttatus*) is very similar to the Swainson's Thrush, and I still wonder if I've got this one identified properly -- perhaps, someone can correct or confirm. The iBird app states that Swainson's Thrushes are quite common throughout Canada and into the northwestern US and Alaska in the summer. Before winter, they migrate to southern Mexico, and Central and South America. Unlike some species, the male and female Swainson's Thrushes are similar. They eat insects, snails and earthworms. As well, they consume fruits and berries during their fall migration. Posted on 2010-02-07.

## Male Ruddy Duck



To continue warming up our winter, I decided to post a shot from last summer. I took this photo of a male Ruddy Duck (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) at Frank Lake, Alberta. That location is just east of High River. It was near the end of July and the weather was quite warm.

There's an observation building at Frank Lake where one can get a good view of many of the water birds. In addition to Ruddy Ducks, one can see Eared Grebes, American Coots and many varieties of shore birds in the spring and summer months.

The Ruddy Duck can be found throughout Alberta in the summer, and in some parts of BC, Saskatchewan and Manitoba; they are also numerous in many of the mid-western states (from the iBird Explorer Canada app for the iPhone/iPod). The male is easily recognized by his blue bill and bright red-brown body. The female Ruddy Duck, on the other hand, has a (quoting from the iBird app) "gray-brown body, dark cap extending below eyes, dark cheek stripe through gray cheek patch, and dark gray bill." Also, from the iBird reference, this species "Feeds on pondweeds, wild celery, algae, seeds, aquatic insects, shellfish, and crustaceans; forages on the water surface and by diving."

Here are some links with additional information about the Ruddy Duck:

<http://birding.about.com/od/birdprofiles/p/ruddyduck.htm>

<http://www.oiseaux-birds.com/card-ruddy-duck.html>

[http://www.aquariumofpacific.org/onlinelearningcenter/full\\_description/ruddy\\_duck/](http://www.aquariumofpacific.org/onlinelearningcenter/full_description/ruddy_duck/)

Posted on 2010-02-10.

## American Bittern Filler Photo



I saw this bittern in June, 2014 at Frank Lake. I figured that they had to be around, but I hadn't seen one at Frank Lake before. I thought that it was a juvenile Black-crowned Night-Heron at first—they have similar colouring and markings

## Variable Darner Dragonfly



I'm not 100% sure of this dragonfly species, but I think that it is most likely a Variable Darner (*Aeshna interrupta*). I saw them often at Frank Lake, Alberta last year. These dragonflies are quite large, probably about 2 1/2 to 3". They cruise around marshy areas looking for insect prey. They often hover for a second or two. At such times, it is possible to get a shot of them. I captured this one using 1/3200 sec.

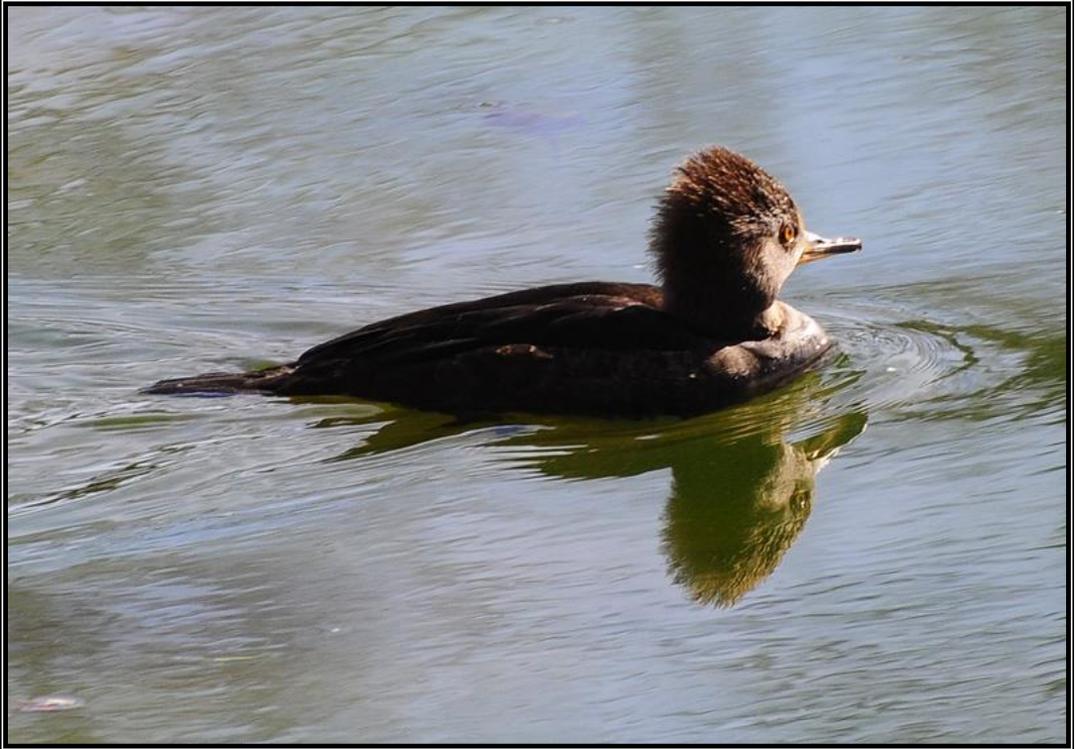
The PP I did on this photo started in Picasa with a closer 4:3 cropping. Then, I adjusted the colour temperature slightly. I went to CS4 next, and increased the contrast and brightness. Finally, I adjusted the saturation a bit. I stayed away from any noise reduction and sharpness adjustments, except what I did in my D300.

A good link for information on the Variable Darner is:

<http://talkaboutwildlife.ca/profile/index.php?s=727>.

Posted on 2010-02-23.

## Hooded Merganser Hen



I'm still recovering from a leg injury I suffered early in December -- while out taking pictures, of course :). Yesterday, on Mar. 1, I decided to go to the Inglewood Bird Sanctuary in Calgary. It was my first nature photo shoot in almost three months. In addition to the usual Mallards, Goldeneyes and Seagulls, I spotted a very reclusive duck called the Hooded Merganser (*Lophodytes cucullatus*). This one was a hen, swimming all by herself. It was quite dark where she was, but I noticed that when she turned her head to one side a little, her bright orange eye became very noticeable. I managed to get a shot with her head in that orientation.

From <http://talkaboutwildlife.ca/profile/?s=55>:

The Hooded Merganser has something of a reputation for being a rarity in the Calgary area. None the less, it occurs regularly on migration in small numbers from late April to late May and again from late August right through to mid-November. A pair or two often survive the winter on the Bow River.

The mergansers have serrated bills for holding live prey. Consequently the Hooded Merganser does not eat vegetable matter, but dives for small fish, larvae, amphibians and any other form of aquatic life that it can

catch.

This merganser nests in tree cavities. The cavity is lined with leaves, grass and down.

Here are a few other sources of information about this interesting little duck:

<http://www.animalpicturesarchive.com/view.php?tid=3&did=27247>

[http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/hooded\\_merganser/id](http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/hooded_merganser/id)

[http://www.conservenature.org/birds\\_of\\_wny/hooded\\_merganser.htm](http://www.conservenature.org/birds_of_wny/hooded_merganser.htm)

[http://www.seattleaudubon.org/birdweb/bird\\_details.aspx?id=92](http://www.seattleaudubon.org/birdweb/bird_details.aspx?id=92)

Posted on 2010-03-02.

## Mountain Bluebird Filler Photo



It was July, 2011. I had just pulled up to park at the Spring Well Ranch south of Spruce Meadows. Thankfully, I had my camera on the passenger's seat. There, on a strand of barbed wire fence, was a Mountain Bluebird. That was the first one I had ever seen. I took a couple of shots through the window. So beautiful!

## Common Merganser on Bow River



Yesterday, I visited the Inglewood Bird Sanctuary in Calgary again. I went to my favourite location overlooking the Bow River. In addition to Mallards, Canada Geese, Seagulls and Common Goldeneyes, I saw a few Common Mergansers. This is one of my photos of one flying up the river, after having been carried down by the current and diving near the edge of some ice -- Goldeneyes also like to ride down the river, dive, then fly back. According to the iBird Explorer Canada iPod app, the Common Merganser (*Mergus merganser*) is a large, sleek diving duck. The males' heads are green-black with a bright red bill. Females are gray overall with red-brown crested neck and tail, and an orange bill. They like to feed on insects, small fish and aquatic plants. In my photo, this Common Merganser looks to me like a small, very aerodynamic aircraft. Posted on 2010-03-06.

## Canada Geese Heading North



Canada Geese (*Branta canadensis*) on the wing are often an indication that the season is changing. The two in my photo were flying above the Row River in Calgary. My vantage point was the Inglewood Bird Sanctuary. Canada Geese don't seem to fly in any particular direction depending on the season. When I first started watching them in Canada, too many years ago, I wondered about them flying north sometimes when winter was approaching -- or, flying south when it was clear that the weather was getting warmer. What they are actually doing is flying to "staging or resting areas where they join up with others" (from iBird Explorer Canada iPhone/iPod app). Thus, Canada Geese might fly in any direction, regardless of the season, depending on where they are going to congregate. As it happens, the geese in my photo were heading roughly northeast. Posted on 2010-03-08.

**Kill-dee, Kill-dee!!**



I'm thinking about spring, even though it's not quite here in this area. I took this photo of a Killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*) last June near two small ponds in Okotoks, Alberta. I found this bird at the top of a hill. It had been in the grass, which camouflaged it well. I took some shots of it in the grass also, but this one on a path displays the Killdeer markings better than my other photos.

From the iBird Explorer Canada iPod application, the Killdeer is a "Large banded plover with brown upperparts and white underparts, and two distinct black bands cross the upper breast. White stripes on wings are visible in flight. Tail and rump show rust-brown in flight. Sexes are similar. Juvenile has single breast band."

The Killdeer emits a loud, piercing "kill-dee" or similar call, which is what the one in my photo was doing at the time. If you didn't know that a Killdeer was near, you very quickly learn that they're around when you hear their distinctive call.

There is, of course, much information on the Internet about this very common shorebird (that often nests and lives far from water). Here are a few links that seemed interesting -- note the different calls that are presented in the third URL:

<http://talkaboutwildlife.ca/profile/?s=97>

<http://www.nhptv.org/NATUREWORKS/killdeer.htm>

<http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Killdeer/id>

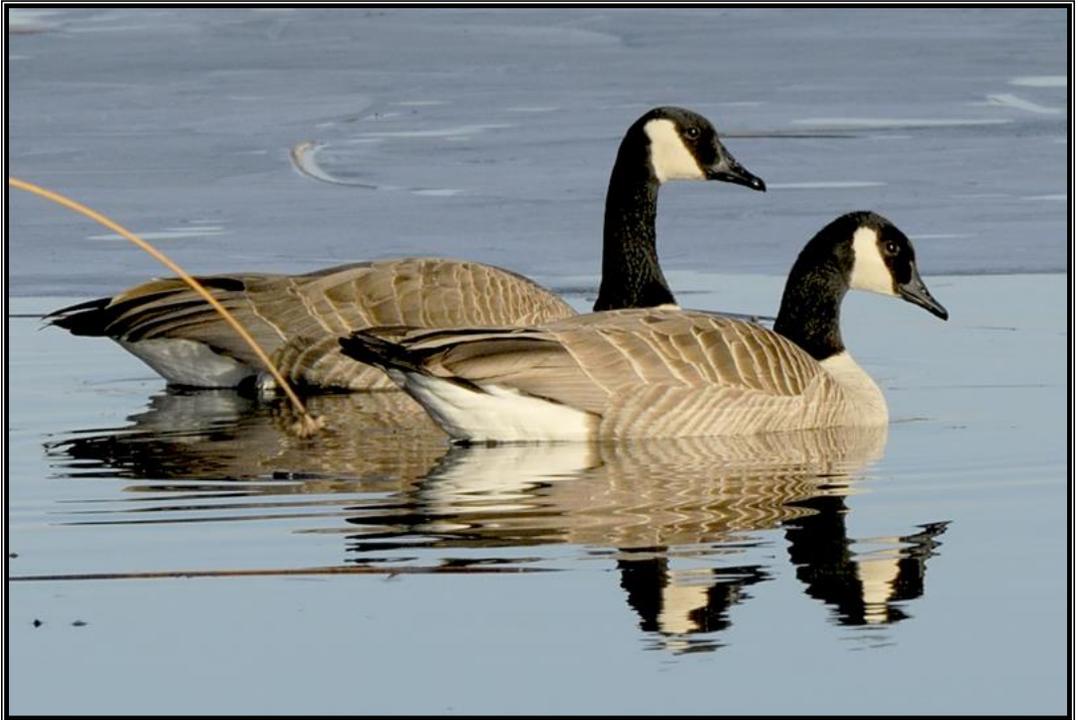
Posted on 2010-03-15.

## American Coot Filler Photo



I took this photo in July, 2013 at Frank Lake. An American Coot was standing just out of the water, displaying those amazing feet. They use those feet to advantage, regularly coming out of the water to walk in the mud—it's kind of like they have built-in “mudshoes”.

## Canada Geese at Red Deer Lake



I was at Red Deer Lake, just off Hwy. 22X in Calgary, two days ago. There is still quite a bit of ice there yet, as there is on many small lakes and marshes in Alberta. The only birds I saw were Canada Geese (*Branta canadensis*) and a couple of unidentifiable ducks. The geese were paired up, like those in my photo. No doubt, they're waiting for the weather to be just a bit warmer before having a family. The top half of my photo shows a piece of the ice surface behind the geese. I noticed that farther down the lake, where there is more ice, there were also more geese. Many of the pairs seemed to be content with walking or lying on the ice, rather than trying to find open water.

Between now and June, Red Deer Lake will come alive with thousands of birds, since this is a favourite nesting place. If it's like last year, there will be, in addition to the geese: Franklin's Gulls (by far, the most numerous of the birds), Mallards, Common Mergansers, Eared Grebes, Ruddy Ducks, White-faced Ibises, Willets, Spotted Sandpipers, American Coots, Red-winged Blackbirds and Yellow-headed Blackbirds. Of course, Northern Harriers, Black-billed Magpies and American Crows will be around as well. Posted on 2010-03-25.

## Goldeneyes on a Golden Pond



This photo shows male and female Common Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*) ducks -- the male is the one in front. I spotted them at the Inglewood Bird Sanctuary in Calgary, Alberta. There is now open water on all of the ponds at Inglewood, and these ducks are one of the many species that have welcomed this change. On this evening, the water had a very pleasant golden glow due to the sun slipping low on the horizon.

Common Goldeneyes winter throughout the continental U.S. states (except for Alaska). However, they breed throughout most of Canada and Alaska, and a few of the U.S. states just below the Canada/U.S. border. These are medium-sized diving ducks that feed on insects, crustaceans, mollusks, small fish and aquatic plants. Their nest is usually located near a pond, lake or river, but may be found in woodlands up to a mile from water. (The preceding information came from the iBird Explorer Canada iPod/iPhone application.) Posted on 2010-04-06.

## Sure Sign of Spring!



The American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*) is one of the birds that I always associate with the arrival of spring in Alberta. They have been around for several weeks, according to the local bird reports, but I didn't see one until last Monday. Two of them visited our yard briefly. The incident was kind of cute. Initially, there was a female (lighter coloured breast than the male). She went down behind a small evergreen in our yard, as though she was hiding. Soon after she arrived, a small male (brighter breast) hopped along the fence. He listened quite carefully by the tree, just as robins do when they're hunting worms. He didn't hear or see anything, so he left. Soon after that, the female came out and flew away. I took some photos, but none of them were very good, unfortunately. Later that day, I went to the Inglewood Bird Sanctuary in Calgary, and saw two fine looking robins that seemed to be together. One of them, the male, I think, posed in a tree just off the path I was on. I took several pictures, but there were a lot of branches in all of my shots that made the photos look quite busy. The photo I decided to post is cropped quite closely to the robin, but it allowed me to trim away the busy branches. We may still get snow before May, but spring seems to have arrived! Posted on 2010-04-07.

## Black-capped Chickadee at Inglewood



The Black-capped Chickadee (*Poecile atricapillus*) lives year-round throughout Canada and Alaska, and in all of the northern and central U.S. states. This photo shows one of the birds at the Inglewood Bird Sanctuary in Calgary, Alberta. There are a few areas of the sanctuary where chickadees try to get handouts from passersby -- which you're not supposed to provide, by the way. It is usually quite difficult to get a good photo of a chickadee, because they are in your face and then gone again. If you're wandering around the sanctuary with a 70-300mm zoom lens, as I do, all of a sudden, you may encounter a chickadee that is too close to you. On this occasion, several chickadees arrived that were just at the limit of my lens. This shot shows one of them, making his characteristic "chick-a-dee-dee-dee" call. Actually, the sounds they make are not so simple. I was reading in my iBird Explorer Canada iPod/iPhone app that "The song of the Black-capped Chickadee is one of the most complex vocalizations of all animals, acting as a contact call, an alarm call, to identify an individual, or to indicate recognition of a particular flock." In the case of the bird in my photo, I'm quite sure that he was asking "Whatcha got for a Chickadee?" Posted on 2010-04-09.

## Franklin's Gull at Red Deer Lake



Franklin's Gulls (*Larus pipixcan*) have returned to Red Deer Lake -- that's a small, marshy area off Hwy. 22X, just west of Spruce Meadows. If it's like last year, there will soon be 1,000 or more of these gulls at that location. In the spring, Franklin's Gulls come up mainly from South America to the three Canadian prairie provinces, and a few U.S. states just south of there, in order to breed (from the iBird Explorer Canada iPod/iPhone app). Apparently, these gulls typically lay "three buff, olive or brown eggs with brown and black markings." They are laid on a "floating platform built above the water and lined with fine grass and plant down." The iBird Explorer app goes on to say that incubation takes "18 to 25 days and is carried out by both parents." Posted on 2010-04-20.

## Male Red-winged Blackbird



I took this photo of a male Red-winged Blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) at Red Deer Lake, in Calgary, Alberta. That is a large marshy area west of Spruce Meadows off Hwy. 22X. Thousands of birds nest in this location. Among them are Red-winged Blackbirds. These birds live year-round in most of the continental U.S., but they breed in a few of the most northerly states and Canada. The female lays three to five pale blue eggs marked with dark brown and purple. They are laid in a cup of marsh grass or reeds and attached to emergent vegetation or built in a marsh shrub. Incubation takes 11-12 days, and is carried out by the female. I obtained the preceding information from the iBird Explorer Canada iPod/iPhoto app.

The blurred BG is a hill that is quite far away. I used an open aperture in order to enable a fast shutter speed, in case the bird suddenly flew away; thus, I had a shallow DOF. I didn't crop too closely to the bird, because I thought that the inclusion of the tree branches improved the image.

Posted on 2010-04-21.

## RW Blackbird at Red Deer Lake



I was at Red Deer Lake in Calgary, Alberta this afternoon. Each day, more and more birds seem to be settling on that location as their nursery. Among more than a dozen species of birds, there were Red-winged Blackbirds (*Agelaius phoeniceus*). I was able to take many shots of the males, as they moved from one set of reeds to another. I never did see any females -- they are likely on nests somewhere in the vicinity. I was fortunate to be able to catch some of the males showing their bright red and yellow shoulder patches as they flew. The one I've posted is my best shot of the day of that type. Posted on 2010-04-23.

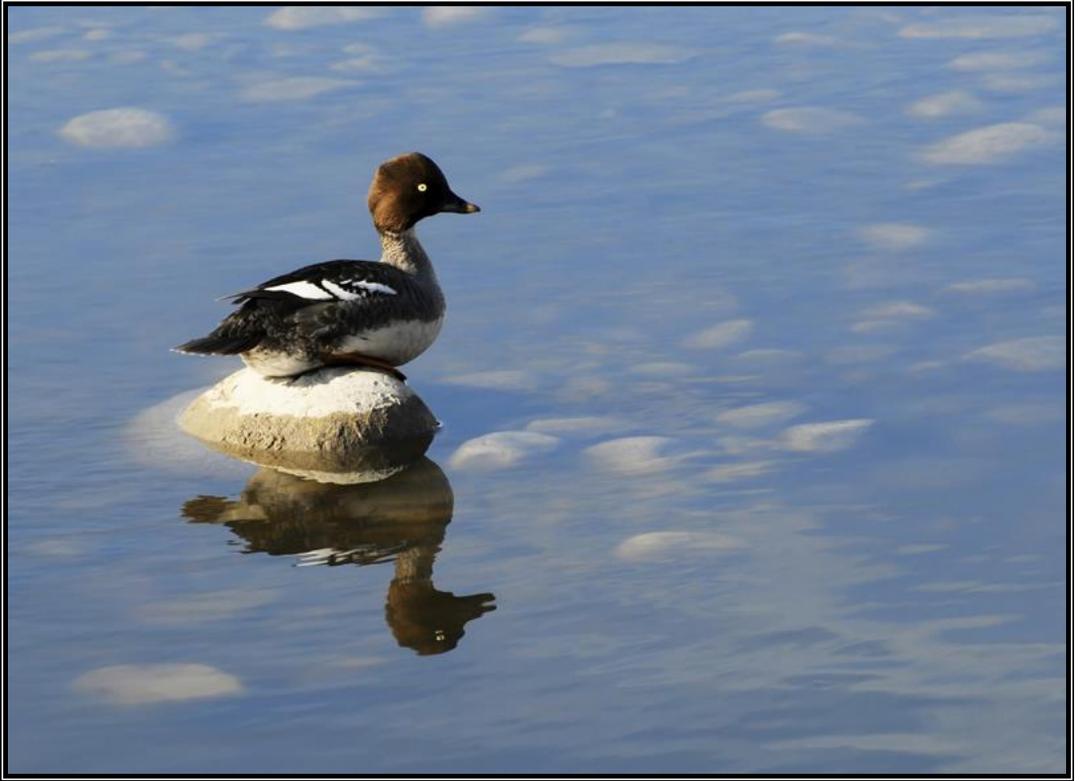
## Blackbird Staking Out His Territory



Before today, I hadn't figured out that the reason that I hadn't seen any female Red-Winged Blackbirds (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) at Red Deer Lake is that there aren't any there yet. Long time birders are probably saying, "Duh". The male Red-winged Blackbirds arrive at a cattail marsh, typically, about one week before the females, and stake out a territory. They defend that territory fiercely. They sing their raspy song and flash their red and yellow shoulder patches at all comers. If another male gets too close, they'll attack. Successful males, that have been able to establish a good nesting area, can expect to attract multiple mates. The females make nests and blend in very nicely with the surroundings, as they incubate their eggs -- unlike the males, they aren't black; instead, they are heavily streaked with brown, beige, white, and a little yellow, and with very faint red shoulder patches. While the females are on their nests, the males stand sentry duty nearby. Much of this information came from "Birds of Alberta", by Chris Fisher and John Acorn.

My photo today shows one of the males, perched on a reed, declaring to all concerned (especially, to other males) that this is his area, and trespassers need to beware. He's also hoping to be the first to attract any females that might happen by and be impressed with his song and colours. Posted on 2010-04-25.

## Pretty as a Picture



I took this photo of a female Common Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*) yesterday, at the Inglewood Bird Sanctuary in Calgary, Alberta. She was sitting there, pretty as a picture, on a small rock. Her better half was in the water about 10 feet away. She may not have the flashy markings that he has, but she's still quite a beautiful duck in her own right. I was reading in my iBird Explorer application that female Common Goldeneyes typically return to the place where they hatched year after year. They apparently like to nest in tree cavities, like Wood Ducks. The Inglewood Bird Sanctuary has many nest boxes on trees, which are no doubt attractive to both species. Posted on 2010-04-26.

## Trumpeter Swan



On April 26/10, at Red Deer Lake, I saw a bird flying toward me that I thought was a gull carrying something. I saw a Franklin's Gull carrying a piece of a reed last year at this location. However, when I looked through my viewfinder, I saw that it was really a swan -- what a large bird!

When I consulted my iBird Explorer application, my initial identification of the bird was that it was a Tundra Swan (*Cygnus columbianus*). However, I have since determined from The Sibley Guide to Birds that it was actually a Trumpeter Swan (*Cygnus buccinator*). I had to consult other photos that I took at the time. I saw that there was a V-shaped border at the top of the swan's bill. I also observed that the line from the eye to the bottom of the bill was fairly straight. The Tundra Swan, on the other hand, has a rounded border at the top of their bill. And, the line from the eye to the bottom of the Tundra's bill has a curve, just before the gape, instead of being straight.

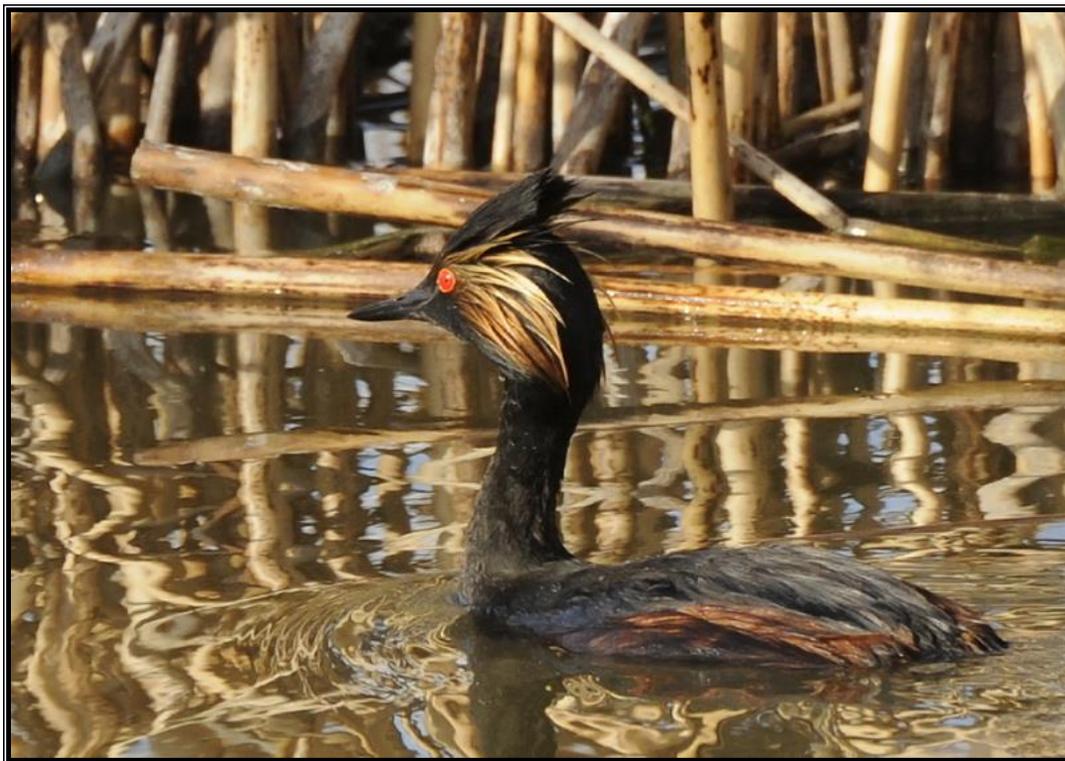
The one in my photo is the first swan of any species that I've seen at Red Deer Lake. According to iBird, Trumpeter Swans breed at a few locations in southern Canada, as well as in the north of Canada and Alaska. I have returned to Red Deer Lake several times since my first sighting of the swan, and it is still there. So, it would seem that, if the swan has a mate there on a nest, Trumpeter Swan cygnets might be coming to Red Deer Lake in the near future. Posted on 2010-04-27.

## Male Yellow-headed Blackbird



Just as the male Red-winged Blackbirds have been establishing their territories at Red Deer Lake, so the male Yellow-headed Blackbirds (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*) have been busy setting up theirs. The male blackbirds don't build nests, they just decide which part of the marsh is theirs, and try to defend it. When the female Yellow-headed Blackbirds arrive, the males of their species try to lure several of them into their domains. The females build nests into emergent vegetation over the water. Incubation of the eggs takes 11 to 13 days, and is carried out by the female. The preceding information was obtained from the iBird Explorer application for iPod/iPhone. Posted on 2010-04-28.

## Eared Grebe at Frank Lake



Eared Grebes (*Podiceps nigricollis*) have returned to Frank Lake, Alberta! This photo shows the first one I spotted this year, when I visited that location two days ago. Instead of the white and grey non-breeding plumage, which they have in the winter, this bird has the full breeding plumage.

These birds are also known as the Black-necked Grebe -- a name that is more in line with their taxonomic name. Eared Grebes may be seen in North America, Europe and elsewhere. Actually, the only continents on which they aren't found are Australia and Antarctica.

In this hemisphere, they winter in the southwestern U.S., Mexico and farther south -- even as far as Costa Rica. In the spring and summer, they breed in the western U.S. and Canada. They prefer shallow, weedy wetlands for their nesting. Frank Lake is a large lake in southern Alberta, with many marshy areas. It appears to be a perfect habitat for Eared Grebes.

They are excellent swimmers and divers, and will chase their prey underwater. Their favourite foods are: fish, small crustaceans, aquatic insects and larvae. The Eared Grebe's legs are set quite far back, and it cannot walk well. They prefer to dive in order to escape from danger,

rather than flying. They can fly well, if they need to, since they migrate as far as 6,000 km.

The above information about the Eared Grebe was taken from the iBird Explorer app for the iPod/iPhone. Posted on 2010-05-04.

## Barn Swallow in Flight Filler Photo



I obtained this photo at Frank Lake in August, 2011. I wouldn't argue at all that this was a lucky shot. I had tried before, and I've tried since, and I've not been able to improve on this photo. I just happened to be standing in the right place at the right time, with my camera settings having been appropriately set.

## Male YH Blackbird Calling for a Mate



We've had snow and cloudy weather for the last few days. Even though the weather didn't look too promising this afternoon, I went to Frank Lake. If nothing else, I knew that there would be Yellow-headed Blackbirds (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*) there -- if they hadn't decided to leave and go back to a warmer climate :).

There were several male birds in the marshes at the edge of the lake. No females have arrived yet. The males were busy tidying up their domains and singing, so that any females that happened by might be attracted. I took several shots of a couple of the blackbirds. I concentrated on times when it looked like they were getting ready to sing. I like the photo I have submitted, because the BG is not as busy as it is in many of my shots. I was quite close to the bird too. Also, the blackbird looks relatively comfortable as he sings -- they can get themselves into the most amazing contortions. Maybe we'll get some warmer weather soon, and maybe, for the male blackbirds' sake, some female blackbirds will arrive soon.

Posted on 2010-05-06.

## White-faced Ibis



I went to Frank Lake again this afternoon. As usual, this time of the year, there were many interesting birds there. I was surprised to suddenly see a White-faced Ibis (*Plegadis chihi*), foraging fairly close to where I was standing. The bird was behind some marsh grass initially, but eventually came out where I could get a good look at it.

They really are quite odd looking, with their long curved bill, a thick white outline around their eyes, long red legs and large feet. I'm not quite sure how to describe their plumage -- there sure are lots of colours -- quite iridescent in the right light. As the bird was making its way across one end of the marsh, it was making a call that seemed to me like a cross between the sounds made by a minimally-disturbed Canada Goose and a pig -- kind of like a "hawnk" sound.

According to iBird Explorer, the length of a White-faced Ibis ranges from 51-66 cm (20-26 in). They stand about 40-80 cm (16-32 in) high. Apparently, the distinctive white colour on their face, from which they get their name, is not there in the winter. Posted on 2010-05-07.

## Clark's Grebe



I went to one of my favourite places yesterday, Frank Lake. Unfortunately, they had either closed the gate early, or they hadn't opened it at all. So, I walked the mile to the main observation area. It was worth the walk. I managed to obtain decent shots of several species of birds.

The one that I want to present today is a Clark's Grebe (*Aechmophorus clarkii*). Actually, if I were to be strictly accurate, the bird in my photo is probably a Clark's-Western Grebe hybrid. Here's the deal: 1) a Clark's Grebe has white all around its eyes while a Western Grebe has black and dark grey all around its eyes; 2) the bird in my photo has a little white and some light grey around its eye, with no black, and just a tiny amount of dark grey to the right of its eye; 3) further, the bill of the Clark's Grebe is usually more yellow than that of the Western Grebe (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*); 4) other photos that I took at that time show a second grebe (although, I didn't know that there were two birds because I never saw them together -- they were diving alternately) with a darker and more greenish bill -- that bird also had black extending past its eye; and 5) photos of the second grebe show a bird with a slightly blockier head than the first grebe -- this is consistent with other photos that I have seen of Western and Clark's Grebes. So, on balance, I believe that the bird in my photo is more like a Clark's Grebe than it is like a Western Grebe. This identification information came from the iBird Explorer Pro iPod/iPhone

app and The Sibley Guide to Birds.

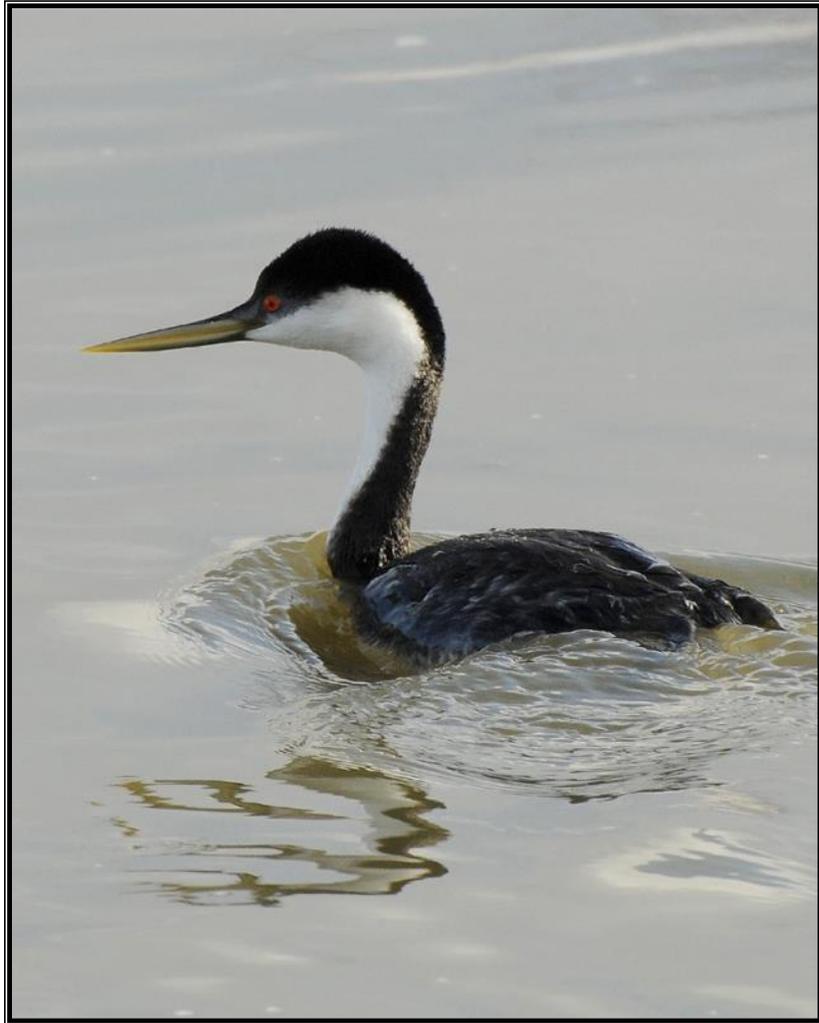
I'll post one of my photos of the Western Grebe tomorrow. Posted on 2010-05-11.

## Ring-billed Gull Filler Photo



There used to be a great Bow River observation point at the Inglewood Bird Sanctuary. In April, 2012 I took this picture of a Ring-billed Gull there. Other gull species that I saw from that spot were Franklin's Gulls and California Gulls.

## Western Grebe

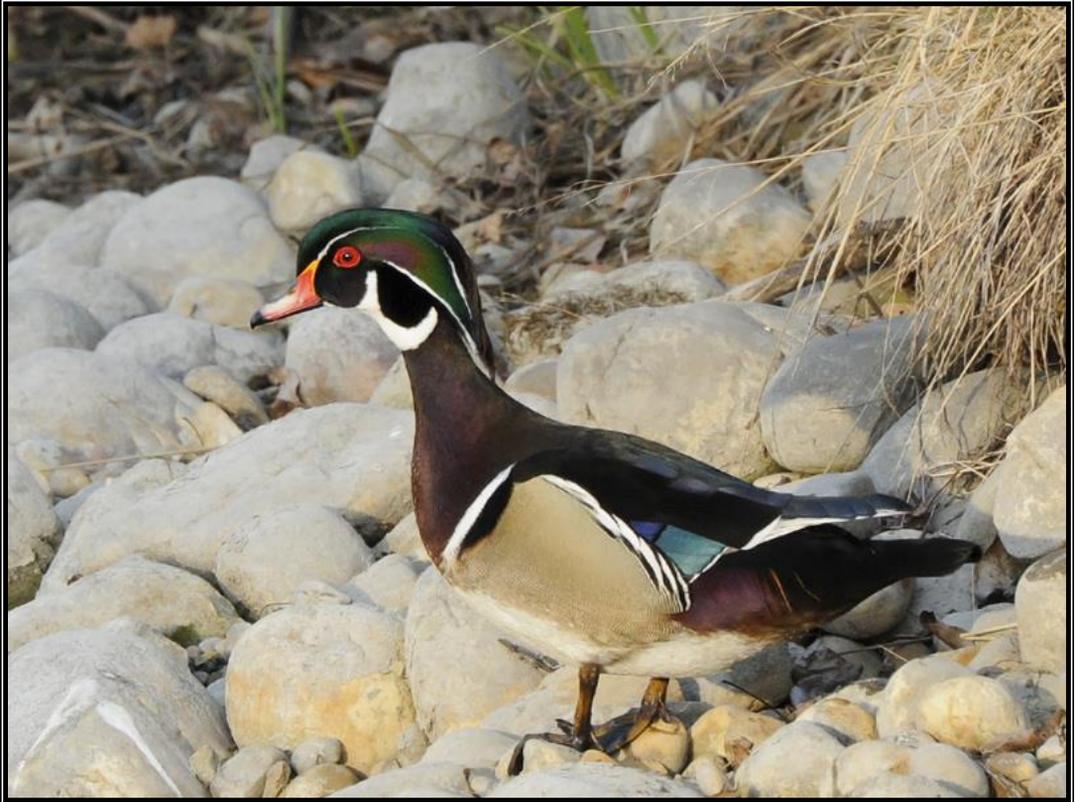


Yesterday, I posted a shot of a Clark's Grebe. As promised, here is a photo of a bird that was with the other one. It is a Western Grebe (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*). The two species are highly similar. I've noted the main differences in my previous posting. But, I'll note them again here: 1) the Clark's Grebe has white all around its eyes, while the Western Grebe has black or dark grey all around its eyes; 2) the bill of the Clark's Grebe is usually yellow, while the bill of the Western Grebe is usually greenish-yellow; 3) the head of the Clark's Grebe is very low and smooth, while the head of the Western Grebe is similar, but just a bit higher in profile.

The bird in my photo had just surfaced, and had its head turned away from the sun. Therefore, with its eye appearing to be darker anyway, due to the surrounding dark grey, it is not as noticeable as the eye of the Clark's Grebe in my photo.

According to the iBird Explorer Pro application, the two grebe species will nest side by side, but there is supposed to be very little interbreeding. The fact that I didn't see any other Western or Clark's Grebes around that day, makes me think that this might be one of those not so usual pairings -- especially, when I consider that the Clark's Grebe I posted appears to be a hybrid of the two species. Posted on 2010-05-12.

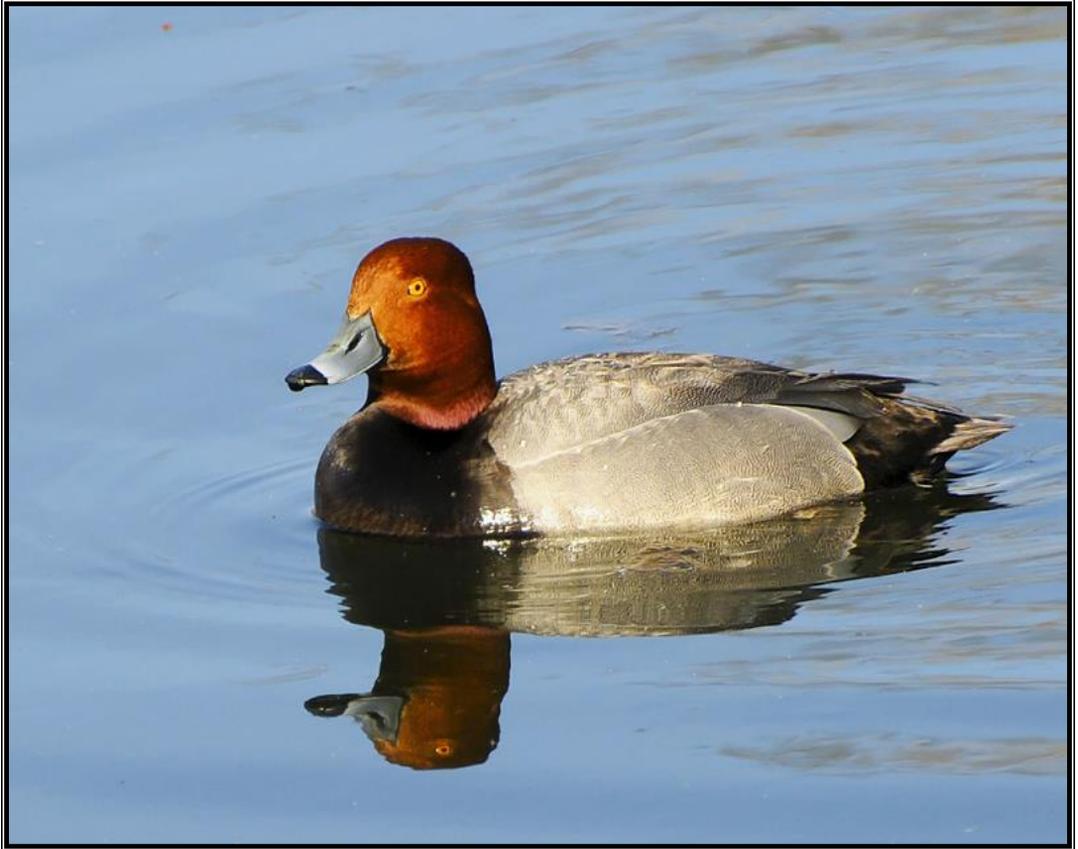
## Male Wood Duck



Yesterday, at Calgary's Inglewood Bird Sanctuary, I saw a pair of Wood Ducks (*Aix sponsa*). I had seen them before at that location, but they were quite far away -- in some trees, where they like to nest. They were so close yesterday that I was able to get a few good shots of them. When I saw them initially, they were swimming on a small pond. Then, they went up on the bank. The photo I have chosen to present shows the male Wood Duck. He was posing in just the right light to show off all of his colours, and that fantastic crest! He is hands down the most colourful duck in the sanctuary. In fact, the Birds of Alberta Field Guide declares "The male Wood Duck is one of the most colourful water birds in North America."

My iBird Explorer application states that "The Wood Duck was hunted nearly to extinction during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Management procedures have been successful and there are now well over a million Wood Ducks in North America." The Birdipedia section of iBird Explorer states that another name for the Wood Duck is the Carolina Duck. It is about three-quarters as large as a Mallard. The Wood Duck shares its *Aix* genus with the Asian Mandarin Duck. Birdipedia says that Wood Ducks "feed by dabbling or walking on land. They mainly eat berries and seeds, but also insects." Posted on 2010-05-13.

## Male Redhead



I had never seen one of these ducks before I visited the Inglewood Bird Sanctuary in Calgary three days ago. It's always interesting what just pops up at that location. My photo shows a male Redhead (*Aythya americana*). According to the Birds of Alberta Field Guide, these ducks are diving ducks, but they also feed by dabbling. Primarily, they eat aquatic vegetation, but apparently they will also eat aquatic invertebrates. The females could be considered to be the duck version of the Brown-headed Cowbird -- but, not to the same extent; occasionally, a Redhead will lay its eggs in another duck's nest. I found it interesting to read that the male Redhead meows like a cat during courtship. These ducks are larger than a Blue-winged Teal, but smaller than a Mallard. According to The Sibley Guide to Birds, Redheads may be found throughout Alberta, southern Saskatchewan, southern Manitoba and the interior of B.C., during the breeding season. They also breed in many of the U.S. states below the four western Canadian provinces. Posted on 2010-05-15.

## Mr. and Mrs. Marbled Godwit



I was leaving Frank Lake, Alberta three days ago, when about 40 Long-billed Dowitchers (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*) arrived, together with two Marbled Godwits (*Limosa fedoa*). The dowitchers are good sized shorebirds, but the godwits made them seem to be quite small. From a wingspan point of view, the dowitchers' wings extend 46-51 cm (18-20 in), while the Godwits have about an 81 cm (32 in) wingspan (from iBird Explorer Canada). The Sibley Guide to Birds states that Marbled Godwits are about 50% longer than the Long-billed Dowitchers, and three times their weight. The godwits looked to be at least twice as tall as the dowitchers. Some of my photos show dowitchers with their legs entirely under water, while the godwits were just past their knees in the same depth of water. The godwits only return to this area for breeding. They may also be found at this time of year in southern Saskatchewan and Manitoba, as well as in the most northerly central U.S. states. The Marbled Godwits are the most common large shorebird in southern Alberta. My photo shows the pair of godwits strolling in the marsh. I believe that the female is the one on the right, since that's the smaller bird. Posted on 2010-05-16.

## Female Red-winged Blackbird



I visited Red Deer Lake, in Calgary, yesterday. For the first time this year, I saw female Red-winged Blackbirds (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) and female Yellow-headed Blackbirds (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*) at that location. The males of both species have been there for several weeks, establishing and defending their selected domains in the marsh.

The photo that I have posted today shows a female Red-winged Blackbird perched on a reed, possibly near her newly built nest -- although, she could have been trying to decoy me. This female is probably not the only mate lured into the domain by the male she selected. Males have been known to defend up to 10 females. A female, however, isn't necessarily true to her lover. In fact, a female will often lay clutches of eggs of mixed paternity. Two or three clutches of eggs are laid in a season by each female, using a new nest for each clutch -- this practice helps keep the nest from becoming infected with parasites that could kill the baby birds. (From the iBird Explorer Pro application for the iPod/iPhone.). Posted on 2010-05-17.

## American Avocet



This photo shows an American Avocet (*Recurvirostra americana*). I believe that this one is a female, since she is more lightly coloured than her mate. I saw these elegant birds at Frank Lake, Alberta last week. That was the first time that I'd been able to get close enough to one for a decent photo. The American Avocet is a large, long-legged shorebird that stands about 45 cm (18 in) tall and is about 46-51 cm (18-20 in) in length. (From the iBird Explorer Pro application.) In the spring and summer, these birds come to southern areas of Canada's three Prairie provinces (Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba) for breeding. They also breed in many of the western U.S. states.

They have a curious upturned bill, which is "just the right shape for skimming food off the surface of shallow waters." (From the Birds of Alberta Field Guide.) I was reading in iBird Explorer that nesting American Avocets, while they may look like passive, non-aggressive birds, have been known to attack and strike Northern Harriers and Common Ravens. Also in iBird Explorer, I read about how innovative the American Avocets are when the water level threatens their nest; apparently, they will "raise the nest up to a foot or more with sticks, weeds, bones and feathers to keep the eggs above water." Posted on 2010-05-19.

## White-faced Ibis Over Frank Lake



This afternoon, I trekked into Frank Lake. We used to be able to drive in. But, this year, they have the gate locked all of the time. Anyway, it's good exercise. And, it was worthwhile. Among other bird action, I saw White-faced Ibises (*Plegadis chihi*) flying. These birds regularly visit Frank Lake every year. Last year, I counted 30 of them one day. This year, I've only seen about 12 at one time -- but, our spring is still young -- and, I haven't been there as much this year.

The White-faced Ibis is 56-64 cm (22-25 in) in length. Their wingspan is about 94 cm (3.1 ft). It's an easily recognized bird, with its long down-curved bill, long legs and its pig-like grunts, as it walks the marsh in search of food. Its face is very distinctive with a band of white feathers around it. It has red eyes and red legs. (From National Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Birds.)

The photo that I have posted is my best in flight shot of a White-faced Ibis to date. It's still not that perfect shot. But, it does show its facial features quite well. The multi-coloured, iridescent plumage is displayed not too badly also. I thought that this shot showed an interesting view, with the ibis presenting its underside to me as it banked toward another area of the marsh. Posted on 2010-05-22.

## Eastern Kingbird



I went to the Inglewood Bird Sanctuary, in Calgary, Alberta today. For a change, I went at noon, instead of later in the day. Since this weekend is a long one (Victoria Day) in Canada, I was a bit apprehensive about trying to photograph birds with the number of people that were probably going to be there. And, there were many people, but the birds didn't seem to mind.

As I was walking on the path beside the Bow River, I was surprised to see a bird light fairly near me. Chickadees do that at Inglewood, and sometimes Robins, but other birds don't usually do that. At first, I thought that it might be a Gray Jay -- I've never seen one of those, but I've seen a few pictures. There was a guy there with a Sibley's field guide, and he confirmed that it was an Eastern Kingbird (*Tyrannus tyrannus*). I had seen a Western Kingbird (*Tyrannus verticalis*) before, and they are similar, except for their grey head and yellow breast. Both species are flycatchers, and very good ones.

Anyway, getting back to my sighting of the Eastern Kingbird, I soon became aware that there were two such birds. Neither of them seemed to be fearful of me or anyone else who walked by. Later, I read in the Birds of Alberta Field Guide that Eastern Kingbirds "will fearlessly attack crows, hawks and even humans that pass through its territory." So, I guess that I

should count myself lucky that all these birds did was light and look, then resume their business of fly catching.

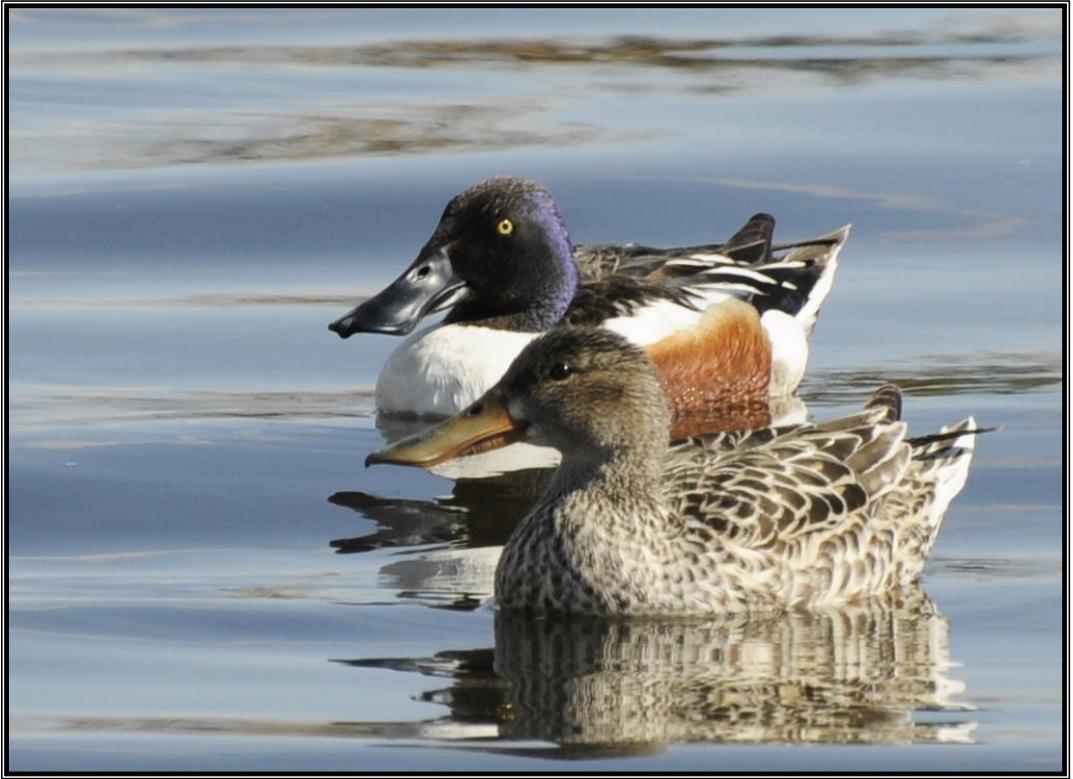
According to iBird Explorer, an Eastern Kingbird is 22 cm (8.5 in) in length. It's a small bird, but large, as flycatchers go. And, evidently, they have a large heart. They may be found throughout Alberta, and in most Canadian provinces, in the spring and summer breeding season. They may also be found in most of the U.S. states during that time. Posted on 2010-05-23.

## Yellow Warbler Filler Photo



We went to Canmore in August, 2014. I went for a walk by a creek and spotted quite a few birds. This Yellow Warbler perched just long enough for me to get a photo.

## Northern Shoveler Ducks



This afternoon, my wife called me from Frank Lake, Alberta. She had stopped by, on her way back from Vulcan, to see if the gate was open. It has only been open twice this year, at least, in my experience. I had long since decided that if I wanted to go there, I would need to be prepared to walk 3.2 km (2 miles) round trip. That's not too big a deal, it just takes time. Anyway, when she called, she was quite excited, because the gate was open! I drove there immediately. The reason that the gate was open, as it turned out, is that migratory bird banding is being done.

As it always is at that site, it was worthwhile visiting. I'll show some of my shots from today in future posts. The one I have selected to post now shows male and female Northern Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*) ducks. I had seen these ducks at Frank Lake before, but they were always out of camera range. Today, they came very close to where I was standing, in the main observation area, overlooking a small pond that is connected to Frank Lake. These ducks measure 43-51 cm (17-20 in) in length; thus, they are smaller than Mallards, but larger than Ruddy Ducks. My Birds of Alberta Field Guide states that "The Northern Shoveler's spoon-like bill allows this handsome duck to strain small invertebrates from a pond's mucky bottom." As I watched them, I decided that they behaved a lot like Mallards. They would swim a bit, then turn bottoms up and dabble for food. The colouring of these ducks is much like that of Mallards also. Just

like a Mallard drake, the Northern Shoveler drake's head looks to be either bluish purple or emerald green, depending on the light. The rest of the drake's plumage is varied and quite like that of his Mallard counterpart. The plumage of the Northern Shoveler hen looks much like that of the Mallard hen -- both have inconspicuous brown and white colouring. Of course, the bills of the Northern Shovelers are longer, wider and more spoon-like, than those of the Mallards.

I should point out that the reason that the ducks' heads aren't dripping with water is that they had just come into the pond. Soon after I took this photo, they began dabbling for food. Posted on 2010-05-25.

## Bohemian Waxwing Filler Photo



I took this photo as I walked to the Stormwater Ponds in Okotoks. There were several of these birds in the trees. It was May, 2011. It looked like they were going after the berries.

## Female Yellow-headed Blackbird



When I was at Frank Lake, Alberta yesterday, I was able to take a few shots of female Yellow-headed Blackbirds (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*). While the males of that species are highly visible and make quite a lot of noise in the marsh, the females are very quiet and aren't very visible at all. "The males are very territorial and spend much of their time perched on reed stalks and displaying or chasing off intruders." (From the iBird Explorer Pro application for the iPod/iPhone.) iBird Explorer states that there may be as many as six females per male, depending on the quality of the territory that the male has established. The females build nests, lay eggs and incubate them. They build their nests in the marsh grass, and their subdued colouring allows them to blend in very well with their environment. Occasionally, a female will appear in order to obtain some food (mainly insects or seeds) or some nesting material -- or, presumably, to respond to a danger call or situation. The photo that I have posted shows a female Yellow-head that came out of the marsh grass for a minute or so. Happily, she stayed visible long enough for me to get a few pictures. Posted on 2010-05-26.

## White-crowned Sparrow



It was snowing today in the Calgary area. They had forecast rain, and more rain, but no one had said anything about snow. Since I didn't go anywhere to take pictures, I decided to post a photo from earlier in May, when the weather was nice.

We were visited by White-crowned Sparrows (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*) on May 10. I don't recall seeing them last year. According to my iBird Explorer, this species is only in this area briefly, during their migration from the southern US and Mexico. They have a length of 17-19 cm (6.5-7.5 in). So, they are a bit larger than House Sparrows or House Finches, which are our usual backyard visitors. White-crowned Sparrows are very distinctive, with a white stripe on each side of the top of their otherwise black crowns, and a third white stripe running down the centre. These birds were regular visitors for two days, then they moved on. They behaved much like the slightly smaller Chipping Sparrows. They perched in one of our evergreens, and hopped around under trees, on the lawn, and by the large rocks in our backyard. According to iBird Explorer, they are primarily interested in foraging for seeds, buds, grass, fruits and insects. Although we provide hulled sunflower seeds in one of our feeders, they did not investigate the feeders.

My photo shows one of the White-crowned Sparrows perched in one of

our trees. I took many shots, but I selected one that, in my opinion, shows their distinctive colours and markings well. Posted on 2010-05-27.

## Marsh Wren Filler Photo



This photo shows one of the very elusive critters at Frank Lake. You only see them for a couple of seconds , then they're gone. This Marsh Wren is taking a dirt bath on the path leading to the observation blind.

## Marbled Godwit Over Frank Lake



It snowed again today in Okotoks. As a result, I didn't get many pictures. So, I thought that I would post a shot from earlier in May at Frank Lake. I took an in flight photo of one of the Marbled Godwits (*Limosa fedoa*) that I posted two weeks ago. These are large shorebirds about 46-48 cm (18-19 in) in length. They have a wingspan of about 81 cm (32 in). (From iBird Explorer for iPod/iPhone.) This species is the most common large shorebird throughout southern Alberta. (From Birds of Alberta Field Guide.) Their bills are so long that one would assume that they would have an easy time obtaining food when they probe in the shallow water and mudflats -- according to iBird Explorer, they forage for worms, mollusks, crustaceans, insects and aquatic plants. The birds evidently feel that their bill is not long enough, because they like to thrust their bills so far into the mud that their face is sometimes covered in it. Happily, in my photo, the bird's head is quite clean, so its features can be seen well. Posted on 2010-05-29.

## Male Red-winged Blackbird



For my first posting in just over one year, I selected this male Red-winged Blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) in flight. I was at the Stormwater Ponds in Okotoks, Alberta.

Every spring, several varieties of blackbirds come to Canada and northern U.S. locations, from warmer regions in the U.S. and Mexico, to breed -- a large percentage remain in the south to breed also. The Stormwater Ponds area typically attracts Red-winged Blackbirds every year. The male blackbirds fly over the water to the trees and reeds, sounding the alarm and flashing their bright red shoulder patches, as an intimidation tactic, when there are intruders. Occasionally, a female blackbird will make an appearance, if she's not too busy feeding, minding her nest or taking care of the little ones (which I've only seen a couple of times over the years -- they hide well). The females, by the way, for those who may not know, are not coloured black at all. Instead, they have a varied brown and cream camouflage pattern, which permits them to hide well in marshy locations.

I was fortunate to be fairly close to one of the challenging male blackbirds one morning on May 14/11. The birds fly abruptly and swiftly, but it's possible to photograph one in the air, if you're persistent (and have a fast lens). In this case, I was able to capture one showing both of his red shoulder patches as he flew over one of the ponds. Posted on 2011-06-08.

## Barn Swallow



I was looking through some of my photos from the previous year. One of them struck me, because it was a reminder of when we were able to visit the observation building at Frank Lake, Alberta. It has not been possible this year, because the entire area in front of the observation building has been flooded. Last year, in June, I was taking pictures of the Ruddy Ducks and Eared Grebes, when I looked over on the side of the observation building and spotted this beauty. He (the breasts of females are lighter in colour) had stopped to rest, before making another pass over the lake, in search of insects. He is a Barn Swallow or *Hirundo rustica*. In the spring and summer, they migrate north from Mexico, Central America and South America, to breed in virtually all parts of the Continental US and Canada - - except for the most northerly regions (from iBird Explorer Pro).

The Barn Swallow, according to Wikipedia, is the most widespread species of swallow in the world. As well as in the regions I referred to above, they can be found in Europe, Asia and Africa. Wikipedia goes on to say that the Barn Swallow is so named because of its use of man-made structures in which to breed. Therefore, with the expansion of the world population, and the building of additional barns, etc., the Barn Swallow's numbers have increased significantly. Posted on 2011-06-24.

