



# THE HARLEQUIN

VFFN NEWSLETTER  
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## VFFN NEWSLETTER

Welcome to the new Harlequin. I hope that it lives up to the reputation of the last one. Thank you, June Hope for all your work in producing this newsletter in the past. As you know we now have a website and if you are reading this, you no doubt have used it. Most of the information that was found in the Harlequin is now available elsewhere on this website. It means that to produce this newsletter I have to come up with creative, witty, informative material. Anyone who wants to help can do so by suggesting topics or better still submitting a write up. For the moment the plan is to issue the Harlequin four times a year, one for each season.

I came across the logo that appears at the top and thought that I would use it because Kelley Cook spent time and effort to design it. We are now lucky to be able to use photos, either ones we have taken or ones we have borrowed from the internet.

Our esteemed leader, Jean Turner, thought it was time we became digital and once introduced to the idea, it seemed like a perfect solution as a way of dispensing information to members. And so the journey toward our own website started.

The weekend of May 15th was a particularly busy one for some members of the Vermilion Forks Field Naturalists. For a few years now VFFN has been a part of the Meadowlark Festival. It offers the same venue each year, but participants find it worthwhile and do not want it changed. For Princeton, the festival began Friday with Tour 14--Vermilion Bluffs and Hoodoos from 8 a.m to 12 and Tour 20--Swan Lake Sanctuary from 1p.m to 4 p.m.

Tagging along as a VFFN volunteer I saw these field trips from a total different perspective. I was seeing these places as a visitor would see them, and I could understand the delight and enthusiasm for each site. Beginning with the first tour, we met at Riverside and carpool down to the entrance of the tunnel on the KVR. The weather was perfect, plenty of sunshine, but getting warmer as the day progressed. The leader of the tour was Sue Elwell assisted by Cathy Lahaie, two very knowledgeable ladies about the birds in this area.

On our walk we saw 28 different species of birds, Harlequin duck, a family of Canadian Geese with 5 goslings, Belted Kingfisher, Yellow Warbler, American Crow, American Robin, Mountain



Exiting the tunnel, visitors prepare to cross the trestle over the Tulameen River.



Visitors photograph and admire hoodoos on the KVR.

Bluebird, Osprey, Song Sparrow, Common Raven, Steller's Jay, Turkey Vulture, Mallard, Spotted Sandpiper, Spotted Towhee, Mountain Chickadee, Audubon Warbler, Warbling Vireo, White Crowned Sparrow, Violet Green Swallows, Tree Swallows, Red-Breasted Nuthatch, Northern Flicker, Common Merganser, Red-napped Sapsucker, Rufous Hummingbird, Blackheaded Grosbeak, & Blackbilled Magpie.

Luckily for me, Cathy kept a good account of all the birds. I spent my time trying to find the birds with my binoculars, not an easy task for me, but with some persistence I managed to locate most of them. The walk back to the cars gave everyone a different view of the area and the group dispersed for lunch; most were continuing on to a different spot for the afternoon. The group that attended the morning session came from the Lower Mainland, North and South Okanagan, and the Interior. The Meadowlark Festival which lasts for 5 days does attract many naturalists and there are many venues that they can choose.



Vermilion Bluffs from a different angle



In the afternoon a different group met at Riverside this time to do Tour 20--Swan Lake Sanctuary. The tour leaders were Madelon Schouten and Cathy Lahaie. Madelon gave an explanation of how and why this area was selected to be a sanctuary site and then she described how a kettle lake is formed. As we walked along she pointed out signs that gave information about the plants and wild flowers. She apologized for the incomplete list, but indicated that the project was on going. Finishing her part of the tour, Madelon left the group and Cathy took over. The Lahaie family is very involved in maintenance of this site. We followed Cathy along the Ridge Trail, which circles the lake high up. The group stopped occasionally to listen and identify bird calls. It is amazing how many of these naturalists can hear the call and immediately identify the bird, but finding them can be tricky. We noticed many bluebirds (both Mountain and Western), saw an American kestrel, and then a kestrel fighting a much bigger Red-tailed



The 20 participants hiked the trail to gain an appreciation of the area; unfortunately few wildflowers were out.



Hawk. By hiking down to the lake we viewed more species, the Yellow-headed Blackbird, Ruddy Duck ( a giveaway with its beautiful blue beak), Mallard Duck, Violet-Green Swallows, and many others, a total of 25 species. A few wildflower appeared but not many; the weather needed to warm up for any kind of show. The visitors exclaimed delight at the area and warmly congratulated us on our good fortune.

Some more gorgeous weather greeted us on the second day of events, Saturday, May 16th. This time Princeton was hosting the provincial conference of the Rocky Point Bird Observatory. This group is mostly involved with hummingbirds and hummingbird banding. Sue Elwell was the host leader aptly assisted by Allison Moran, Coordinator of HummingBird Banding. Between these two ladies a wealth of information was given. Also present at the meeting were the banding group from Osprey Lake, Terry Tellier, bander, assisted by Myra Quadling, and Ruth Bourgoin and from Princeton, of course, Sue Elwell, plus Cathie Lahaie, and Donna Hills. The morning was spent on discussion and distribution of information regarding the new improved banding sheet, plumage characteristics, tarsal swelling, pox, and hygiene practice; things that were all put to use once the actual banding started. These topics were presented by different attending participants.

We left Riverside at 9:30 a.m. and headed for the former Hope Ranch to do some serious banding until 12:30. This site is a favourite one because of the large numbers of hummingbirds found here. Upon arrival people set up tables, equipment, and traps.

On an outside porch two traps were set up weighted down with plastic jugs full of water to keep them from moving about. It works really well. Meanwhile, the trapper sits and waits for the hummingbirds. The bird enters the trap and it is allowed to drink first before the net comes down. Both traps were managed by Donna Hills who showed great versatility in doing this. I had the opportunity to try one and it is not as easy as it appears. Once a bird was captured, Donna shouted "Bird On" and someone came and with great care took the bird out, not an easy task. Some of the participants were somewhat apprehensive doing this



Myra sets up the hummingbird trap.



but soon got the hang of it. The birds were then delivered to the tables. Once at the table the bander would do a full inspection, looking for any infestations by gently blowing on the bird to expose the skin, measuring the wings, and size of the bird, noting gender, looking at plumage, in particular the tail feathers, and so forth and finally attaching the band. Equally important in the process is the recorder who noted down all the information the bander was giving. The bird was then released.



After a very busy banding session the group cleaned up and headed to Riverside for a delicious lunch provided by the Princeton Group and visiting participants as well. Then back to the classroom to listen to reports from South Vancouver Island, South Okanagan, North Okanagan, West Kootenay, the Fraser Valley and Nechako Valley. The one participant from Edmonton, Alberta did not give a report.

Terry Tellier gave a vivid description of an aggressive Rufous male protecting its territory against an injured



Donna watches for a bird to enter the cage.



intruder, followed by Sue Elwell's revelation of new hybrid, a cross between a Calliope and a Rufous! Other hybrids have been found, i.e. a cross between a Rufous and Anna's, but ours is the first of its kind!

The conference ran for 3 days, but I only attended the first day, interesting stuff; I gained a better understanding of hummingbirds and hummingbird banding and an appreciation for the individuals who undertake such projects.



Two pros show how to retrieve hummingbird from the net, Terry (top photo) & Sue (bottom)



A new hummingbird hybrid, a cross between a Rufous and Calliope