

# It happened at Iona

I mean the sewage plant in coastal BC,  
not the island off Scotland !



# October 14, 2015

There is nothing special about this date, except for the fact that a few unfortunate creatures that come under the class of Aves were subjected to the indignity of being scrutinized by another group of animals under the class of Mammalia.



October 14, 2015 was perhaps the last Wednesday of the season when Delta Nats would venture out to chase birds with a binocular this season. From what I hear, our emperor has passed a verdict that henceforth all birds of BC will consider themselves presentable only on Tuesdays.

So here we were, the not quite rag tag bunch. Missing are some of the photographers that did not run fast enough to get in the frame, and that Metro Vancouver movie gang that carried huge video equipment and an intention to interrogate Ann, Tom and whoever else they thought





might be guilty of knowing too much about birds and the bees.

At the beach, there was a solitary killdeer on a log, watching the sandy bank exposed by low tide, while keeping an eye a horde of Russian avian snow tourists that liked to hang out among themselves, make a lot of noise, and were perhaps on their way to Nevada, or some such warmer latitude.

One can be justified to suspect that the killdeer had no idea how it was assigned that strangely violent name. Neither does the author of this report.



There was a teenage kid that was visiting from Spain, who informed the English speaking crowd on the difference between Español and Castellano,.

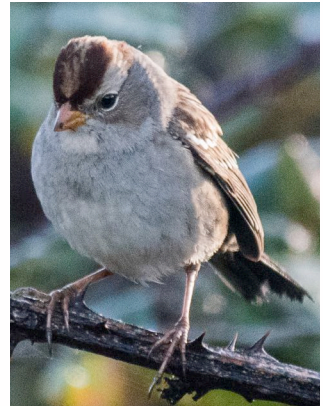
The hominid gang had by now walked between the river and the pond, but only after giving a solitary sun-kissed northern Shrike a respectable distance for long enough time so all the casual birders had a look at the bird, which kept its back turned to the mammalian visitors, perhaps as an indication of what it thought about them.





The movie crew from Metro Vancouver, tried their best to get a tight pack of the Naturalists walking towards the camera, with the man high bushes on one side, and the fence to the sewage settling ponds on the other, with the morning sun percolating through the foliage lighting up the left

side of their faces. Their training had apparently not prepared them to the possibility that staying together or working according to a plan in front of a movie camera was not a strong point of the naturalists. Snow



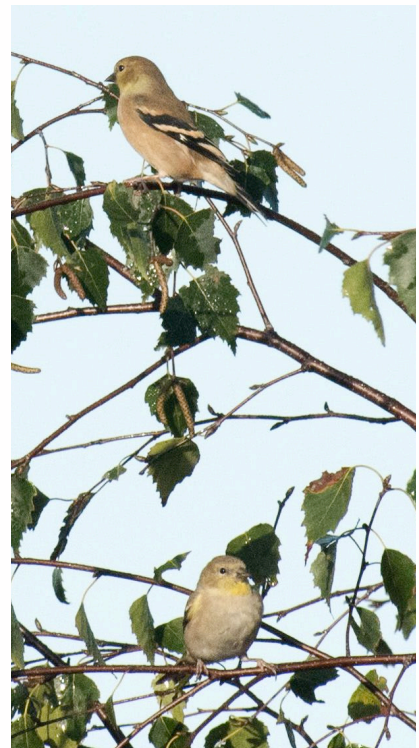
geese flying overhead or crowned sparrows sitting on the metal fence, paid scant attention to the goings on.



Eventually, the members of the family of hominidae managed to

walk by ponds that had gadwall, pied bill grebe, coot, shovelers and various kinds of other water birds, and attempted to "act" in front of the video camera, while entering the fenced area, looking around as if they were actually interested in birds.

There was a nip in the air, a chill in the wind, but warmth in the sun. So, folks were observed shedding layers of clothing, as well as



putting them on, depending mostly on how much of insulating adipocyte or fat cells the hominids had under their skin, and how their respective



brains translated the sensation of heat loss or heat gain through skin and appendages. A pair of goldfinches looked unimpressed by all this activity, even as a bunch of ducks took offence at this intrusion into their space and took off with a noisy display.

The level of water in some of the ponds where shallow, with islands and patches vegetation visible in the middle of the ponds. A small number of gulls floated overhead, or swam in the shallow pools. An occasional heron could be seen enjoying the sun, or perhaps contemplating the future of bird kind.

By now the gang had reached the fourth pond on the right, at the south-west corner, along Ferguson Road. This pond showed a few interesting creatures that occupied some of the hominid gang for a while.



There were ducks such as mallards, pintails and shovelers. An occasional raptor, in the shape of a juvenile bald eagle, a northern harrier, or even a merlin went across the collective

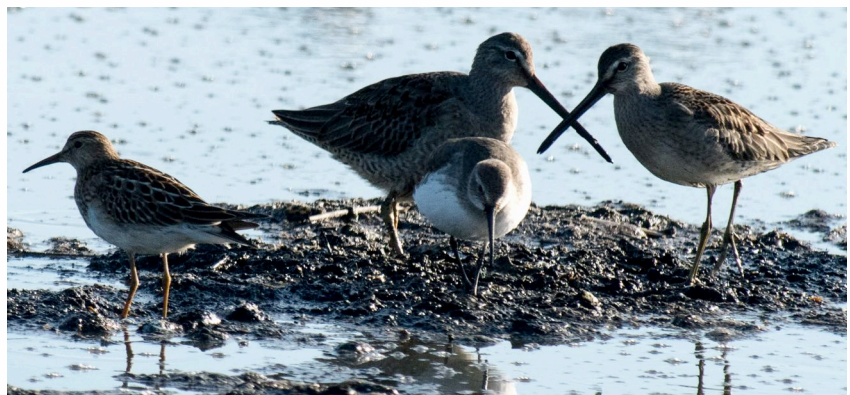


view of the visitors, as did a noisy belted kingfisher. A near albino duck, perhaps fitting the description of a Leucistic bird, was feeding along with other ducks. From the shape and colour of its bill and from its general shape, it did not look like a pintail. Best one could guess, it could have been a mallard or a crossbreed of some kind.



Then there were this small group of shore birds on a muddy island path in middle of the pond. It was thought to include a pectoral sandpiper, a long billed dowitcher, a smaller dowitcher that some thought

might be a short billed one, and a mystery bird that might be a dunlin or a curlew sandpiper or a stilt sandpiper.



Everybody took pictures, but from the shadow side of the birds under a harsh direct sun, so images were not as good as they could have been. As it turned out, experts within the visiting hominids helped in identification; the two dowitchers were both long billed though one

clearly smaller than the other, and the size difference could be due to sex, with the male being larger.

Also, the pectoral sandpiper too is known to vary in size a lot, hence here it appears to be smaller than the mystery bird. Of course, the hominids were aware that they themselves varied in size a lot, with and without link to their sex.



The mystery bird, or bird-X, turned out to be a likely dunlin and not any of the rarer curlew sandpiper or stilt sandpiper. This was finally confirmed the next day, by the hominids that used advanced techniques

allowing them to pass information and knowledge over vast distances almost instantly, without the need to be close enough for one to speak with the other.

Soon, a few hominids that belonged to a separate gang, met up with the Delta Nats at a dyke off Steveston highway. A member of this new hominid gang, who was assigned the name of Peter Zorodozny, a vagrant from eastern Europe, came across a member of the Delta Nats

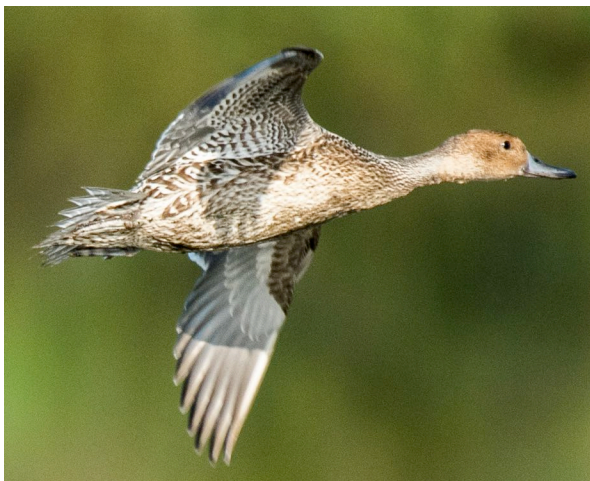






hominid gang carrying the name of Tony Mitra, a vagrant from India, while both of them were watching an avian vagrant from the south that was assigned the name of tropical kingbird.

Face to face, these two hominids exchanged information the traditional way that included an evolutionary trick their species had hit upon a while ago, commonly known as speech, using a format known as language, of a type called English which, by the way, was not native in the land of either of the participating vagrants.



The information passed was about the yet unresolved but suspected description of the mystery bird in Iona Beach. This highly evolved and advanced method of information exchange, sometimes called a verbal banter, or just plain talk, was used, to pass information that might have been wrong to start with, i.e. that the curved bill white and grey

bird was a suspect "curlew sandpiper".



This can be taken as an example where advanced technology does not always transmit good information.

Anyhow, news, correct or otherwise, often travels fast between different gangs of hominids share a common interest - i.e. naming and identifying feathered animals that fly, and are excited by those creatures that usually do not fly around in the area.



Anyhow, hominid Tony received through another complicated and very advanced technique called Flickr mail, a request from a hitherto unnamed hominid of the feminine sex - Melissa, herself a suspected vagrant, but the reporter is unsure where she is a vagrant from. This Flickr mail mentioned that she got the news of the suspect mystery bird from Zorodozny, and would like to get a copy of the pictures taken of it, so she too could weigh in on the species ID.

Technology comes with associated hassles. Tony of the Delta Nats hominid gang did not have email address of Melissa, a hominid from



other gangs. So, at the end of the day, another packet of information along with pictures was put up in a place where a bunch of hominids often hanged around, virtually speaking, and where Melissa was known to spend time. This virtual hominid hangout is called Birding in BC group forum. The packet of information included comment that the prevailing opinion was that the mystery bird might be a dunlin, but a final opinion was being sought from hominids who knew more about avians.



Anyhow, some of the sapiens left the now plain jane dunlin and its friend shorebirds to their mud-poking and went on to Steveston dyke to find the Tropical Kingbird that should be



wintering in South America west of the Andes mountains and not in British Columbia at all. Even in breeding season, it is known to be no further north than southern Arizona and the lower Rio Grande valley. And yet, there it was, plainly visible, perched high on a bush and looking around.



This was not the first time some of us saw this bird. It had appeared a while back elsewhere in Delta too. The climate is changing, as apparently, are some bird migration patterns. Good for the casual birders, I suppose.

Cheers  
Tony

