IBA in the Spotlight: Little Qualicum Estuary to Nanoose Bay

Stretching from the mouth of the Little Qualicum River in the northwest to Nanoose Harbour in the southeast, the Little Qualicum Estuary to Nanoose Bay IBA covers 30 km of coastline on Eastern Vancouver Island. The mostly rocky shoreline is broken up by several estuaries and large, varied, tidal flats of sand, rock, pools, eelgrass beds and mud.

These rich habitats attract a large variety of wildlife, especially birds. Eelgrass beds provide key habitat for spawning herring, rearing juvenile salmon and other forage fish, which in turn draw large numbers of waterbirds in the spring. Among the most notable are globally significant numbers of Brant (up to 8,000). A large percentage of the Western population of this species rests and feeds in this IBA for up to 30 days coinciding with the herring run, which typically occurs in February-March. This stopover is critical for a successful journey from the Brant’s Mexican wintering grounds to their arctic breeding grounds.

Glaucous-winged, Thayer’s and Mew Gulls are common to abundant in this IBA from late fall to mid-spring, with maximum abundance during the herring run. Very large congregations of waterbirds, sometimes up to a million in number, can be seen on the water during the second half of April. These flocks include all three scoter species, Long-tailed Duck, Greater Scaup and Pacific Loon.

Healthy eelgrass beds and productive estuaries are crucial to maintaining the large number of fish, birds and other organisms that depend on this stretch of shoreline. Much of the shoreline is protected within a Wildlife Management Area and Rathtrevor Provincial Park. Careful development along the shoreline and in the water, restoration of hardened or degraded areas, and minimizing pollution from urban and industrial activities will help protect eelgrass beds and other important habitats. An annual Brant Festival held in March-April raises awareness and celebrates the IBA’s importance for Brant and many other waterbird species. You can help by participating in the Brant Festival or local bird conservation and monitoring initiatives. For more information, contact iba@bcnature.ca.

By Krista Englund and Hans Laue
Project Update: Strengthening Municipal Level Use of Biodiversity Information in Local Planning

Earlier this year, Bird Studies Canada began a one-year project funded by the Real Estate Foundation of BC to increase the use of IBA information by municipalities and regional districts. The project expands on previous outreach projects conducted by BC Nature and Bird Studies Canada to raise awareness of IBAs with various federal, provincial governments and conservation organizations. The goal of the current project is to strengthen local governance and land-use decision making with respect to conservation values, targeting coastal areas of eastern Vancouver Island and the Lower Mainland where high human-use overlaps with Important Bird Areas. Although the IBA designation is non-regulatory, it can be very beneficial to local governments because of its global reputation and it can help prioritize and/or further support local government conservation initiatives or identify sensitive areas for possible Development Permit Area bylaws. In addition, bird monitoring data can be used in site level planning and included in local habitat atlases.

One of the first outcomes from this project was the addition of IBA information and other bird conservation guidance to the revised provincial land development guidelines “Develop with Care 2012: Environmental Guidelines for Urban and Rural Land Development in British Columbia.” These Guidelines were jointly prepared by the BC Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations and the Ministry of Environment. The Guidelines apply province-wide and are designed to be used by local governments, planners, engineers, public works staff, developers, consultants, architects, landowners, real estate agents and others involved in land development decisions. See http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/wld/documents/bmp/devwithcare2012/

Currently we are working with a number of local governments to incorporate information about IBAs and bird conservation objectives into a variety of planning and policy initiatives such as Official Community Plan (OCP) updates. An OCP outlines the longer term vision for a community and includes objectives and policies to guide decisions on planning and land use management within the area covered by the plan. An OCP can also designate development permit areas for several reasons, including environmental protection.

This summer we submitted recommendations on a draft OCP update to Cowichan Valley Regional District for the Cowichan Bay area, which overlaps Cowichan Estuary IBA. Other local governments to which we plan to submit recommendations for their OCP updates include the City of Parksville, Surrey and Richmond, all of which have waterfront areas that overlap with IBAs. As well, we will be working with City of Vancouver planners regarding Community Plan updates for the West End & Grandview-Woodland neighborhoods. Vancouver’s Community Plans are similar to an OCP – they consider long-range and short-term goals for a neighborhood and help guide future growth and development while considering broader City-wide objectives. These processes, which involve considerable public consultation, are still underway and will likely continue into the fall, if not longer.
Project Update cont’d

Otherwise, we will be providing input to Surrey’s new Biodiversity Conservation Strategy, to Burnaby for their new Environmental Sustainability Strategy and to the Fraser Valley Regional District for their updated Regional Growth Strategy. There are also good linkages between regional parks and IBAs and we’ve communicated with Metro Vancouver and the City of Vancouver regarding their Parks Master Planning initiative and Parks Strategic Plan, respectively. Finally, we will be providing input to the Capital Regional District for their new Parks Management Plan for Island View Beach which overlaps the Sidney Channel IBA and more opportunities may arise in the next few months.

Although much work remains to be done for this project, the response has been very positive and local governments are interested to learn about local IBAs and to explore ways to include bird conservation information in planning and policy initiatives. This project is a short-term pilot however the outcomes and the process can be applied to local governments in other regions. Any Caretakers or others with suggestions or questions, please contact Karen Barry at BCprograms@birdscanada.org. By Karen Barry

Building Caretaker Capacity in IBAs

Volunteer Caretakers are the eyes, ears and hands on the ground at Important Bird Areas. Caretaker activities range from monitoring birds and assessing habitats and conservation threats to increasing local awareness and/or conducting conservation activities. IBA partners Nature Canada, Bird Studies Canada and BC Nature assist Caretakers by providing coordination, materials, support and training.

In May 2012, BC Nature received a grant from Mountain Equipment Co-op to help build the capacity of Caretakers and other volunteers. This grant provides IBA partners the resources needed to develop better materials for Caretakers (e.g. annual report form, assessment form) and make existing materials more available (e.g. communication guides and examples). Workshops and webinars are being designed to provide training to Caretakers as needed (see fall events below). As capacity allows, IBA coordinators can also work individually with Caretakers to develop site specific monitoring/assessment protocols. Participation in training opportunities is optional for Caretakers and we hope that experienced Caretakers will be keen to share their knowledge with others.

BC Caretakers were recently asked to complete a short poll to assess their interest in specific topics and their availability to attend webinars and regional workshops in the Lower Mainland (Tsawwassen), on Vancouver Island (Nanoose Bay/ Parksville), and the South Okanagan-Similkameen (Cawston/Osoyoos). Results are being compiled and will be used to design the most effective program possible.

While these workshops and webinars are designed for designated Caretakers, they provide a great opportunity for other volunteers to learn how they can assist their local Caretaker or volunteer independently to help conserve IBAs. For more information or to find out how you can attend a session, please contact your local Caretaker or IBA Caretaker Coordinator Krista Englund at iba@bcnature.ca or 604-468-8658.

Thanks Mountain Equipment Coop for your continued support!

Upcoming Fall Events in an IBA Near You!

- All Buffleheads Day, Sidney, October 14 (11 am-noon), Information: http://www.shoalharbour-stewardship.org
- BSC Coastal bird monitoring workshop, Stanley Park, Vancouver, October 27 (9:30 am-2:30 pm), Registration/information: bcprograms@birdscanada.org
- IBA Caretaker/Volunteer Workshop, Tsawwassen, November 7 (10 am-dinner) Registration/information: iba@bcnature.ca
- BSC Coastal bird monitoring workshop, Cammidge House, Tsawwassen, November 10 (9:00 am-2:00pm), Registration/information: bcprograms@birdscanada.org
- Fraser Valley Bald Eagle Festival, Chehalis Estuary IBA, November 17-18, Information: http://fraservalleybaldeaglefestival.ca
**Tribute to Peter Newbery**

It is a funny thing that some unplanned events can return good things again and again. Thirty years ago, Peter Newbery from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) in Sandy, England came to BC for a visit. He would tour the province to learn how the Canadian Wildlife Service ran its interpretation program and managed its reserves. In exchange, I was to visit him to learn from the RSPB reserves program. As it turned out, Peter and I were of identical age and held many similar interests. A fast friendship formed between Peter and my family. During one of his many visits, Peter brought over a newly minted book of European IBAs. The concept seemed a good match for Canada. Art Martell, then Director for CWS in Pacific and Yukon agreed and encouraged me to work on it in BC. Many months later, other colleagues in North America were thinking the same thing and I was invited to attend an organizational meeting called by the Commission for Environmental Cooperation in Montreal. The IBA program for Canada, the USA and Mexico was launched. I sought Peter’s advice on many other ideas including the Young Ornithologists Club that gave rise to the Young Naturalists Club of BC. Earlier this year, Peter died from cancer but his legacy lives on in fond memories and conservation programs in British Columbia.

By Rob Butler

**IBA Updates**

- The boundary for **Boundary Bay-Roberts Bank-Sturgeon Bank (Fraser River Estuary)** IBA has been updated
- The online site summaries for **English Bay Burrard Inlet, White Lake and Osoyoos Oxbows IBAs** have been updated
- Action lists were completed for **White Lake and Osoyoos Oxbows IBAs**, which led to the installation of a new sign in White Lake IBA in partnership with The Nature Trust
- The BC Nature website has a fresh new look and includes an updated section on Important Bird Areas

We wish to thank everyone who helped make these updates possible, including Rob Butler, Art Martell, Peter Davidson, Anne Murray, Karen Barry, Janet Moore, Betty Davison, Marg Cuthbert, A Rocha Canada, Mary Taitt, George Clulow, Robyn Worcester, Patricia Banning-Lover, Ian Moul, Lisa Scott, Doug Brown, Doreen Olson, Bob Handfield, Eva Durance, Dick Canings, Orville Dyer, Kirk Safford, Mark Weston, Bryn White, Tanya Luscz, Andree Mackay, Christine Bishop, Rene McKibbon, Megan Harrison, Carl McNaughton, Nick Burdock, Bruce Harrison, Barbara Pryce, Alyson Skinner and all volunteers and researchers who contribute data to ongoing monitoring programs.