

in the papers that the Lark Group would contribute \$25,000 for landscaping of McKenney Creek.

I'd been told that the 4-storey building cost \$23 million and that the FHA was planning a buy back half the building and that the Lark Group would be leasing the other half of the building back to hospital related clients.

On 26 October Al Hogarth, a Maple Ridge alderman and former mayor, and Geoffrey Clayton, with the Alouette River Management Society, both charter members of the External

Landscape Committee, accompanied me to meet with Ian MacDonald and Ian MacLeod, to of the upper echelon of the Fraser Health Authority to discuss McKenney Creek. Everyone walked the grounds examining the potential of the creek. I made enquiries and learned that the creek flowed along the Lougheed Highway for almost half a mile and was therefore not fish-friendly at the hospital.

On 30 July 2005 I tendered my resignation to Nitta Spittal, the new President of the RMHS explaining that there had simply been too much confrontation over the previous 3 years and 3 months with the hospice society. It was one day short of the 4-year anniversary of Dad's



Baillie House, a new hospital building, coming out of the ground on the north side of McKenney Creek. If the footprint had of been moved 40 to 50-feet to the south, there was a chance that the new McKenney Creek Hospice Residence could have had access to lawns and the creek.

# Birding Trip to Burns, Oregon

During our 2005 holiday back to Ontario, Tina and I had stopped off in Regina and dropped off two complete Olson strobe units to an electronics guru for repair. We left everything with him and I was fully convinced that this person could fix the old problematic units with up-to-date electronics. On our return I stopped to pick up the units only to find he had not only moved but both his home and cellular phones had been disconnected. Although I spent a great deal of time trying to chase this person down, I never saw him or the strobes again. This left Damon and me in the worst possible situation as we had a trip to Oregon planned and now didn't have high-speed strobes. Desperate, we bought two battery operated "studio" lighting systems that fired full power at 1/700 second, half-power at 1/1,400 second, and at one quarter power at 1/2,800 second. These units turned out to be a far cry from the Olsen units and were definitely not capable of stopping small birds in flight.

In 2006 Damon, David James, and I drove down to Burns, Oregon, in two separate vehicles to photograph birds. We left on 20 May. Damon had been down to Burns the year before and was anxious to try and get photos of nesting Snowy Plovers but he had gone too early in the season.

I became upset with Damon for driving in the car pool lane for vehicles with passengers as I couldn't keep up, and about 400 miles out of Burns my cellular phone died and we became separated. About 100 miles out of Burns I had a car with two occupants tailgate me through an especially dark forested area for mile after mile. When I slowed the other car slowed; when I sped up the other car sped up, and when I pulled off to the shoulder the other car pulled over. I became concerned for my safety and began flashing S.O.S. Morse code on my high beams at vehicles that passed us in the hopes that they'd call the two suspicious vehicles into the police. That's exactly what happened and I had a police escort into Burns. It turned out that the occupants of the other vehicle were Damon and David. Before our trip ended, the town, state, and federal police as well as the state rangers would have

checked us out. My vehicle, with my logo, business name, web-site address and phone number turned out to be an excellent cop magnet. In hindsight, I wish I'd never opted to advertise my business on my vehicle.

Our trip to Burns was truly a time of discovery and we learned a great many new things about birds and about ourselves during this six-week trip of a lifetime. One bird that we really wanted to photograph was the Wilson's Phalarope, as it's the male that does the incubating of the eggs, but only after the laying of the forth and final egg. It is the female that has the richer chocolate shoulder patches. The egg-laying process usually takes four to six days and then the male begins all the incubating alone until the eggs all hatch at the same time. The female in the meantime goes off to mate with two, three and sometimes four new male partners to increase her gene pool. Neither Damon nor I have ever experienced shore birds whose eggs all hatch simultaneously abandon the nest. From the time the first chick hatches and dries out until the last can be as short as four hours. We once photographed a Common Snipe in Richmond, BC and managed to get photographs of a piped egg, then three eggs and one chick, two eggs and two chicks, one egg and three chicks and finally four chicks. All the chicks dried out and were gone within an hour.

Late in the day on May 27 David and I decided to drive out to Double O Ranch to check on a Snowy Plover nest that Damon had discovered a few days earlier. It turned out that we headed right into a terrible storm with extremely strong winds. We drove out to the nest site and from a distance saw the female plover hunkered down and leaning into the wind and incubating one egg and brooding two chicks. It was a terrible predicament as the light was fading, so we opted to use the vehicle as a shield for the birds and to shoot from the vehicle. At times both the male and the female were at the nest brooding and incubating with a third bird standing a short distance away. We decided to stay at the nest and use the vehicle to provide protection for the birds until the winds abated.



The author's Sports Utility Vehicle displaying his business name 'Waite Air Photos Inc.', company logo, web site address - [globalbirdphotos.com](http://globalbirdphotos.com) & phone number.

We returned home and told Damon of our good and bad luck, and he suggested that we return in the morning on the off chance that the birds were still on the nest. We arrived back at the site at 7:00 a.m. to grey skies, but within half an hour the sun came out and it warmed up. Damon and I were able to set up the blind and equipment without chasing the adult off the nest. By 8:00 a.m. we had a pregnant situation for some awesome shots of either the male coming in to visit the female and the babies or the third egg hatching. At times the female purred like a kitten and in doing so extended her throat to display a white gorget. There was no wind whatsoever. Damon managed to get several shots of the parent and the babies. We left shortly afterwards leaving the parent incubating the one egg and brooding the two babies. Incidentally, I returned to the area on 30 May, America Memorial Day, and dune buggies and motorbikes had driven all over the flats.

One of the challenges of bird photography is getting shots of birds doing something that has perhaps been written up but never documented with photographs. On the 31 May we managed to do just that with a Virginia Rail nest that had two babies

and seven eggs, but by morning the situation had reversed and the nest had two eggs and seven babies. The female incubated and brooded at the nest, and as each baby hatched and dried out she would carry it to the opposite side of the marsh, where they were gathered into a group and brooded by the male. There were grunts and cackles between the two adults as they communicated. One of the highlights for me was seeing a Virginia Rail carrying one of its babies through the marsh in its beak much like a cat would carry a kitten. Unfortunately, I missed a great full-frame shot because I didn't give the auto-focus on the Canon camera a chance to focus. Because I was still unfamiliar with some of the camera's functions, I failed to depress the shutter only part way to allow the auto-focus to kick into operation and the shot was blurred. Damon later managed to get photographs of the female picking up several of her babies at the nest prior to transporting them across the marsh.

On June 9 I found a family of Mountain Bluebirds nesting in an abandoned American Robin's nest in a juniper about four feet off the ground only a short distance from the roadway. I guessed that all

the available tree cavities had been appropriated by other bird species. I drove back to find Damon and told him of my rare and unusual discovery. Damon referenced his collection of books that evening and found reports of Mountain Bluebirds appropriating the nest of an American Dipper and an American Robin, but neither of these old reports had been documented with photographs. We decided that we'd take as many photographs as possible to document this nest.

On the 14 June I was set up photographing the bluebirds when Randy Caldwell, trooper from the Oregon State Police Fish and Wildlife Branch, happened to see my vehicle. He walked to my set up and engaged me in conversation. He noticed my saw and then observed that I had cut a couple of dead branches that were about one inch in diameter that had been located about eight inches underneath the robin's nest. He took photographs and told me that he was going to give me a ticket for harassing wildlife, to wit: a Mountain Bluebird. I tried to explain to him that the baby bluebirds, because they normally nested in tree cavities where they could be quite vocal by screaming for food in a protected nest cavity, would surely have been predated by shrikes, hawks or owls, all of which were nesting nearby, by being in the robins' nest. My words fell on deaf ears. Ironically, he did not request that I dismantle my equipment but allowed me to carry on suggesting that I apply for a permit to photograph wildlife. He gave me the ticket even though the parents were coming in to feed every two to three minutes while I stood not more than five feet away outside the blind. By this time the babies were feathered and would stand on the outside lip of the nest screaming at the parents for food. They fledged the following day.

The policeman said that the maximum fine was \$299 but that the judge would likely look at all the facts and give me a much lesser fine to pay if I pled guilty. Two days later I had my day in court with the judge. It was a strange situation as we were the only two people in the courtroom. We talked and I pled guilty because I was planning to return home in a few days and didn't want to leave any loose ends. After listening to my explanation, the judge told me that he'd like to give me a very minimal fine but



Snowy Plover - This species was listed as threatened in Oregon in 1993.



Virginia Rail - First documented evidence by photography of a rail carrying its young in its beak.



Wilson's Phalarope - It's the male of this species that incubates the eggs and broods the young while the female goes off to mate with other males to improve her gene pool.



Mountain Bluebirds are strictly cavity nesters, right? That's what all the books say—which is why I was so surprised when my mentor, Don Waite, came back to the blind where I was photographing Vesper Sparrows and told me about the nest he had found. "You're not going to believe this," he said, flushed with excitement. About a mile up the road, he had come across a pair of Mountain Bluebirds carrying food, and he was able to track them to a juniper tree. Although this was exciting news, it got even better: when Don approached the tree, he found a bluebird nest with four small young saddled on a juniper branch. It was not in a cavity but out in the open in the abandoned nest of an American Robin. The bluebirds had simply relined the nest with strips of soft sagebrush and juniper bark. It was an incredible find. This was on June 6, 2005, in Burns, Oregon. A subsequent check of the state's bird nesting records turned up no reports of bluebirds ever nesting outside of cavities in Oregon. It was a first for the state, but I wondered whether any other records existed of this unusual behavior.

I did some research in the days that followed but only found one similar account. In 1932, Olaus J. Murie found a pair of Mountain Bluebirds nesting in an abandoned robin's nest in a cottonwood tree in Wyoming. His report appeared in *The Condor* in 1934. What stood out was his description of how a pair of chickadees had also appropriated an old robin's nest and had further excavated an already unusually deep cup in the mud bowl. Don and I had observed the female bluebird doing a lot of digging underneath the chicks as she brooded them. Perhaps she too was trying to create a sense of a cavity nest by digging as deep as possible into the mud cup.

Because cavities were scarce, this inventive pair of Mountain Bluebirds decided to think outside the box and found the old robins' nest to be a worthy fixer-upper.

that legislation had recently been passed and that he could only reduce a fine by 25 % with the result that my ticket ended up costing me \$225 in American funds. He asked me if I was ever planning on returning to Oregon and I told him that the world was too big and that life was too short for me to ever come back to Oregon. He then asked when I was planning on leaving and I told him two days. He then asked if I could afford to pay \$25 a month for nine months with the payments beginning July 11. I told him that I could handle the payments. When I got home I sent down the \$225 in 9 post-dated payments and a letter came back refusing the money. I eventually got the fine paid. Little did I know at the time that this information would be passed on to Canadian Wildlife Service to make me appear as a "recidivist" or repeat offender and that the Oregon "ticket" would become part of an evidence package against me in Pecticon.

On the 19 June I set up on a pair of Loggerhead Shrikes from 9 a.m until 5 p.m. It was a most interesting day and I managed to get a shot of a parent bringing in a four-inch long lizard and ramming it down the throat of a single baby. It must have easily been 25 % of the baby's body weight. I found it surprising that a book on Oregon birds gave the fledge period 20 days when it was half that length of time. Recorded mistakes of the past seemed to just get passed on into new bird books. The young were seven to eight days old and had their eyes open. Often the parents would be away for periods as long as 15 to 20 minutes hunting. They had the limb of a dead juniper tree, referred to as a "butcher" block, directly behind my blind and I could often watch them carve up a vole or mouse. Once the animal was dissected, the adult birds would take turns and come in with the pieces to feed. Quite often this turned out to be a feeding frenzy with both birds at the nest at the same time feeding. I found that the shrike nest was extremely tidy when compared with many other species. Once I saw a baby appear to be choking on food but then realized that it was regurgitating a food pellet much like an owl. When this occurred, the parent would fly in and eat the pellet.

On June 21 I dropped into the wildlife office and on a

whim invited Ron Garneau, local wildlife biologist, to come out and assist me in photographing the shrike. He drove out to the scene and took photographs of the entire setup while I placed the lights in position. He went into the blind while I waited in my vehicle. I was really beginning to get worried as 20 minutes

lapsed before he took his first photograph. It was the longest 20 minutes of the entire trip. I finally saw a flash and then three more so I walked up to the blind and explained that the pair of adults had likely been away hunting and that they had now caught and carved up something on the butcher block and that they'd be coming in on a regular basis for the next several minutes. He asked if he could remain in the blind and try and get some more photographs.

I explained to him that he had to wait several seconds between shots to allow the flash units to recharge. The biologist and I later had coffee and he told me that had I been staying in Oregon for a longer period or if I returned that he'd give me the necessary permit to photograph birds at the nest. [I later checked and none existed.]

I talked to the state biologist in Salem and told him that I was photographing birds in Burns. We talked about the ticket. I tried to explain that the weather had been cloudless for the past week and



A Western Meadowlark brings a grasshopper to feed its babies. We learned that this brightly colored insect catcher was the State Bird of Oregon.



A Black-necked Stilt picks up her new born chick in her beak.



A male Loggerhead Shrike feeds an entire 6-inch long Alligator Lizard to a baby chick.

that some farmers were knocking down as much as 80 to 100 acres of hay in a single day causing all kinds of deaths to birds. He tried to tell me that the farmers held off with their cutting of hay until mid-July when the nesting season was pretty much over. We argued and I told him that perhaps he should just take a drive to Burns to see for himself the many cleared hay fields. I also mentioned that many farmers were opening water gates to flood out nests on the one side of a dyke while lowering the water level on the other which was causing water nesting birds to lose the clutches. I told him that, with the drop in the water level, the nests, attached to vegetation, ended up tipping over, resulting in the eggs or babies falling into the water. He finally suggested that I call a federal biologist in Washington, DC. I did and told her about my ticket from the state trooper. She explained that there weren't any permits in place that allowed or

disallowed photographers to take pictures of birds. According to her, I should only have been charged if I'd been the cause of the Mountain Bluebird adults to desert their young. She promised me that she would send emails or a fax to the various police departments in Burns and request that they not harass their northern neighbours. It was a great gesture but it came too late in the adventure. We were all about the return back to BC.

I got up early on June 23 and headed for home. My three-week birding holiday had turned out to be 35 days. Damon and David returned to Oregon and spent more time photographing and in the end photographed 27 different species. I had no failures with any of my bird photography. Every nest that I photographed fledged successfully.

I found it ironic that the William L. Finley National Wildlife Refuge, consisting of some 5,325 acres, made up a part of the large area in which we

were doing his photography. It was Finley's bird photographs, taken in the 1920s for National Geographic Magazine that caused President Teddy Roosevelt to set aside land in the first place for birds. The August 1923 issue of NG had a chapter 'Hunting Birds with a Camera' showing Finley without a blind in a tree seated not more than 5-feet away from herons taking photographs. Ironically, it was an early American bird photographer that had caused habitat to be set aside for the birds. Years earlier, I had corresponded with the Finley's grandchildren.



A family of Acadian Flycatchers



A family of Dusky Flycatchers



Long-billed Curlew stands guard over her



A Willet stands guard over her newly hatched chick.