

# Bird Photography in the Okanagan Valley



A Pygmy Nuthatch visits its nest cavity with food for its young.

My wife Tina left in her car and I left in my Sports Utility Vehicle for British Columbia's Okanagan Valley just before noon on the 2 June 2007 for a 6-week experience working together to photograph birds. The plan was to stay in Tina's brother and sister-in-law's guesthouse in Summerland with fellow bird photographer and actor Damon Calderwood. Tina and I were both recently retired and I had convinced her to share with me my passion for bird photography. As a result, I had purchased a custom-made trailer, 22-feet of 5' x 7' scaffolding and two blinds. The scaffolding consisted of four 5-foot high sections. It was therefore 20-feet high with an additional 2-feet of safety rails. Two sections were made of steel and two were made of lighter aluminum. The scaffolding came with safety wires. The platform consisted of aluminum planking with safety clamps. The cameo blinds were of the pop up hunting type that were 5-feet in diameter and 5-feet high. They weighed just 22-pounds and when folded up could be placed in a packsack and carried on a person's back. The blinds could be set up in a couple of minutes and taken down just as quickly. When Tina purchased a Canon camera system identical to mine along with a 180-macro lens, I decid-

ed that we needed the strobe units that were made for the Canon cameras. As a result I purchased 7 flash units—one as a backup—along with two transponders. The transponders, connected to the camera, fired the three wireless strobes with each camera.

Tina and I left our home in Maple Ridge with trepidation as the Fraser River was running extremely high and we had been warned that our home could possibly be flooded. As a result we moved almost everything from our basement to the main level of our home prior to leaving.

One of the first places that Tina and I visited with Damon upon reaching Summerland was Giants Head Mountain Regional Park located just above her brother's home. The first nest that we found was that of a Pygmy Nuthatch located in a dead pine tree about 10-feet off the ground. This nest was ideal for photography. By watching the size of the food that the parents were bringing to the nest cavity, it was obvious that the babies were ready to fledge. As a result, we wasted no time and set up the scaffolding and blind but did not do any photography since the gates to the park were to be locked for the night. Early the next morning Damon sprinted up the mountain and photographed the parents coming to feed the babies. He then came back down the mountain with the camera gear. Later Tina and I drove up the mountain with the SUV and trailer to retrieve the scaffolding and bird blind.

One of the first things I did upon arriving in the Okanagan was visit Bobolink Park near Oliver. Damon had suggested that I walk through the fields and attempt to flush a female Bobolink off the nest. I visited one of the nearby homes and attempted to get the name of the person that owned the property where the bobolinks would be nesting later on in the season. I saw males singing but no females.

I visited a kiosk that was located on Road 22 not far from where Damon and I later photographed Black-headed Grosbeaks, Gray Catbirds and Yellow-breasted Chats. I found it ironic that the huge kiosk never warned visitors about Poison Ivy, Prickly Pear Cactus, the

Black-legged Tick that can cause Lyme Disease that can be fatal—or that the Yellow-breasted Chat was a Species at Risk in this specific area of Canada. There was still a great deal of space left on the kiosk for that information. If the authorities had warned the public about the chat being at risk on the kiosk, Damon and I would have never ended up having our lives turned upside down and inside out a few days later.

On the 8 June Damon called me with the news that a pair of Black-billed Magpies were ready for photography at Vaseaux Lake Regional Park. As an ex-park ranger, I was reluctant to photograph these birds as he had told me the nest was located some 8-feet up in a willow tree some distance from the road. The nest was about 16-inches in diameter with a mud bowl. It was domed with branches with an opening on one side. I had read about the magpies being shot as vermin on the prairies. Apparently this species of the crow family had been observed



Poison Ivy



Prickly Pear Cactus



A 5' x 7' aluminum scaffolding platform used to photograph Pygmy Nuthatches near the top of Giants Head Mountain Park.

pecking the eyes out of newborn calves. I expected them to bring in the young of smaller passerines but such was not the case. They fed the almost ready to fledge two young entirely on grasshoppers and berries. It seemed to me that these birds were wrongfully maligned for things for which they were not responsible. I knew that we would have to cut a narrow pathway in order to get the scaffolding to the nest. I also knew that we would have to cut some vegetation into which we could place the 5' x 7' scaffolding. Once everything was set up, I attempted to do some photography only to be frustrated with the lighting system. It wasn't working.

For the past several years Tina has kept a diary of our travels and 2007 was no exception. On the 11 June she wrote about her experiences photographing the magpies: "I'm really new to the world of bird photography and being in a blind was a new experience for me. I spent 6.5 hours with Donnie watching mostly and learning how he goes about his photography. Eventually I got to get behind the camera and soon discovered that you have to be prepared when something happens. The birds weren't bothered at all with the bird blind, the flashing or us. They just continued as usual tending to the babies needs and cleaning up the nest. There's no stress. I think purists seem to presume when they have no idea unless they actually did what we did—sit and watch what a bird photographer actually does. I discovered, after 10-years, that the Black-billed Magpies always nests in trees on my parents' 10-acre orchard. I always thought these birds were black and white—not true—their colors are an iridescent blue on the wings and green on the tail with black and white bodies.

While Tina and I were photographing the magpies, Damon had discovered the nests of Black-headed Grosbeaks and Gray Catbirds. As is often the case, the two nests were within 10-feet of each other. These nests were located on the Haynes Ranch Historical Conservation Area in Oliver. It must have been the evening of the 7 or 8 June that I assisted Damon "prepare" or "groom" the two nests for photography. Damon, using long-handled shears, cut out a large area a short distance from the two nests into which we planned to place two A-frames with plywood on top the following morning. We stopping cutting the wild rose vegetation 5 or more feet from the two nests. Over the next couple of days Tina, Damon and I all took turns photographing the two nests. On one occasion Tina and I were each atop an A-frame in blinds at the same time and taking turns photographing the grosbeaks and the catbirds. The two adult catbirds and the male grosbeak had been banded and I concluded that the Haynes Ranch Historical Conservation Area was perhaps the most studied wildlife habitat in all of Canada. I tried to get tight shots of the bands on the catbird. One of the catbird adults had a tick on its black cap during several feeding trips into the nest and I tried unsuccessfully to get a tight shot showing the parasite. Quite often both birds were at the nest at the same time feeding or doing janitorial duties. The catbird family adjusted very quickly and carried on as if no one was taking photographs. The female came in and began to brood at 6:30 so I shut down for the day.

It was during this time that Damon and I had a coffee with a local birder who later claimed that he told us that the Yellow-breasted Chat was a Species at Risk. If such was the case, I either wasn't listening or was at the washroom or was buying coffee and donuts. I learned that Damon had send out an email to Okanagan birders on the 31 May telling them that we were going to be in the area and could they help us locate nests. Dr. Richard Cannings, "Mr. Okanagan Birdman", who was well-known to both Damon and I, was one of the responders. He was also a member of the chat recovery team. He told Damon where to go to find Yellow-breasted Chats but didn't warn him that chats were at risk and that almost every nest in the Okanagan Valley was being carefully monitored.



Hand held shears and long-handled shears—tools of the trade in the past but likely tools that are no longer acceptable in bird photography today—unless with a government permit.



A Black-billed Magpie visits its young at a domed nest.

Damon found a chat nest with one or two-day old young on 9 June and on 10 June he cut out three 2-foot by 6-foot patches of vegetation some 9-feet, then 7-feet and finally 5-feet from the nest until he had an area quickly cleared with long-handled shears that was 6-feet square into which he placed his blind. He then sat in the blind to observe the comings and goings of the single parent but didn't attempt to take any photographs.

Damon and Tina took photographs of the chat on the 11 and 12 June. Tina recalled looking out the peephole at the back of the blind and seeing women on the hilly bluff on her first day in the blind. She took several photographs until the female came in wanting to bed down for the night. She took a couple of final photos of the female brooding. The adult sat on her babies, ruffled her feathers and closed her eyes. Tina took two final photos of the bird sleeping.

I came in and retrieved the camera, transponder and three strobes and we left. It was 7:30.

The next day, 12 June, Tina saw the women again on the same hilly bluff. She was in the blind alone taking photographs and I came to see how things were going. She told me that she was getting good photographs and that the single parent was coming and going as if she wasn't even there. She told me that she needed to use the bathroom so we walked out to the roadway and to my SUV. We had left all of the camera equipment at the blind. There was a government vehicle parked in front of my SUV. Just as we reached the roadway the four women came down off the hillside. They told us that one of them had stepped into some Prickly Pear Cactus. They had butterfly nets and told us that they were doing research on a rare butterfly. Tina was curious and asked the name of the butterfly and they told her that it was a Behr's



A brightly-colored male Black-headed Grosbeak visits his nest. Quite often these birds will sit on the nest and vocalize.



A pair of Gray Catbirds bring bugs to their young.

Hairstreak Butterfly. Tina immediately went to the SUV to her insect book and looked up the butterfly. We volunteered to these women that we were in the area doing bird photography. I learned much later the names of these four women who were working with the British Columbia Conservation Corporation for the Ministry of the Environment. Tina and I drove to a garage in Oliver where she used the washroom. We also took time out to eat some lunch.

We arrived back at the chat nest about an hour later and Tina went back into the blind. I used my cellular to call Damon who met me about 50-feet from the chat nest. Almost immediately a young man in a brownish khaki uniform appeared and told us that he'd been talking to the four "butterfly" ladies saying that Tina

and I had told them that we'd found the nest of a Great Gray Owl. It simply wasn't true. We talked and he told us that he was with a group that was doing a study on Flammulated Owls at Rock Creek, about 50-miles away. He was Australian and told us his name was Nigel Jackett. He then brought the conversation around to chats and asked if we'd found any nests. He seemed to be on a fishing expedition. Damon took over the conversation with him and told him that we'd seen some chats but didn't volunteer that Tina was in a blind only 50-feet away taking photographs of the chat. He left shortly afterwards. Tina stayed in the blind until sometime after 6:00 p.m. I visited her and we decided to pack up and leave after the female came in and wanted to bed down for the night. We left the blind with the tripods in position for the following morning.

Little did I know when I awoke on the 13 June that my life would be turned upside down and that I'd never attempt to photograph another bird. The events of that day resulted in my having a complete mental breakdown that placed me in a psychiatric ward of the Maple Ridge Hospital for two weeks, and although I didn't commit any serious crime like rape or murder, I was treated by the legal system as if I'd committed one of those crimes. Damon and I were eventually to become "poster boys" for the Canadian Wildlife Service while at the same time promoting the careers of a particular peace officer and a couple of prosecution lawyers.

On the 13 June I arrived out at the chat site at around 11:30 a.m. The first thing that I did was remove some dead vegetation that I had placed around the nest from the night before to shield it from the sun and to hide it from predation. I then pushed away some of the live vegetation that was growing between the blind and the nest. I got settled in the blind and took 3 or 4 test shots of the baby chats to confirm that the transponder was firing all three strobes. After getting set up the female chat came in to feed and I took her photograph. I remember contemplating a switch from the 100-400 zoom to Tina's 180-macro but realized that the change would involve moving the blind closer to the nest. The blind was probably 5 or 6-feet away from the nest and it had occurred to me that I'd maybe be able to take tight shots with the

macro lens of the large beetles that the chat was bringing to the babies. At full zoom the camera was filling an 8-inch by 12-inch frame. It was at that moment that I heard a woman calling out to me. I stepped out of the blind to talk to her. She identified herself as René McKibbon and a biologist with the Canadian Wildlife Service.

She told me that I was set up on a Species at Risk bird—something that I wasn't aware of at the time. She explained that biologists were doing chat studies in the area and asked me to remove my equipment. I recall being very surprised when she pointed to an orange flag located near the nest. The flag bore the initials YBCH (Yellow-breasted Chat). I was surprised because I hadn't seen the flag before but if I had I would have assumed Damon had placed it there. I quickly dismantled the camera, blind and tripods with the strobes and in one or two quick trips carried everything out to where René was standing.

I explained to René that I'd been photographing birds for many years and had even worked with the Canadian Wildlife Service back in 1985 on a seabird project. She wasn't much interested in anything that I had to say even though we very likely talked for 30 to 45 minutes some distance from the nest. It was when I asked her about the success rate of the chats that she was studying that things began to go awry. She told me that her success rate was 99.9 % and I responded by telling her that I found her remarks very hard to believe and that failure rates can be as high as 80 %. She told me that she had been studying chats since 2002 and had banded some 400-chat chicks.

Ingrid Pollett and Mario Hall, a very well built First Nations male, accompanied René. As a former policeman, I was beginning to feel quite uncomfortable as it would be my word against the three biologists if my problems were to escalate. I was beginning to wonder if I'd been setup considering the four "butterfly" ladies and the "flammulated owl" character of the previous day. And now I was dealing with three against one with one of them being a well-developed First Nations male about half my age. Was he there for the muscle in case I acted up? I learned later that day from an email sent out by Dr. Christine A. Bishop that Dick Cannings



Two signs that were on First Nations property some 9 kilometers from the chat nest. Neither sign made any mention that a Yellow-breasted Chat, a Species at Risk, was under study in the area. Neither was there any mention of the chat at the kiosk that was located with half a mile of the chat nest that we photographed.



The business card that I've carried since incorporating my bird photo business in 2004 at the time of my retirement. It's the one that I gave to René and Mario.

### List of the 25 recipients of Dr. Christine A. Bishop's

1. Doug Adama
2. Sara Ashpole - University of Waterloo
3. Jeff Brown
4. Richard Cannings - South Okanagan Recovery Team
5. David Cunningham - Canadian Wildlife Service
6. Orville Dyer - B.C. Ministry of the Environment
7. Laura Friis - Ministry of the Environment
8. Patrick T. Gregory - University of Victoria
9. Ron Hall - Osoyoos Indian Band
10. Jared Hobbs - Hobbs Photo Images Co.
11. Karen Hodges - University of the Okanagan
12. Margaret Holm (Dick Canning's wife)
13. Pam Krannitz - Canadian Wildlife Service
14. Karl Larsen - University College of the Cariboo
15. Malcolm McAdie - Marmot Recovery Foundation
16. Oswain McKibbin
17. Carl McNaughton - The Nature Trust of British Columbia
18. Kari Nelson - Mount Arrowsmith Biosphere Reserve
19. Roger Packham - Grasslands Conservation Council of British Columbia
20. Harry Parsons
21. Michael Russello - University of British Columbia
22. Mike Sarell - Robertson Environmental Services Ltd.
23. John Surgenor - Ministry of the Environment
24. Bryn White - South Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Program
25. Katy White

was on the chat recovery team. Why did he choose to send us into an area where he knew full well that the chat was an at risk species? Was he involved in the chat becoming a Species at Risk in the Okanagan? Was I being setup? It was certainly beginning to look that way to me.

Mario offered to take some of my gear out to the roadway to my Sports Utility Vehicle. I remember that I was so upset that I wasn't able to fold up my blind for transportation so I carried it inflated over my head and out of the bush to the road. When I got to my vehicle I unlocked it and gave Mario a business card and showed him a copy of Damon's book. While alone with Mario, he suggested that I contact his brother Ron at the Indian Band Office in Oliver and ask for permission to photograph birds on Indian land. I probably talked to Mario alone for 10 minutes before René and Ingrid came out to the roadway. Mario told me that to get to the band office I had to follow Black Sage Road for about 9 kilometers and that I'd arrive at the office.

Shortly afterwards the two women came out of the thickets, and they, along with Mario, climbed into the government vehicle and drove off towards Oliver via Black Sage Road. I called Tina and told her that I'd had a run in with some biologists. Our cellular phones showed that it was 12:20 p.m. I then drove along Black Sage Road towards Oliver. It was my first time to ever travel this route and I was surprised to see a sign for Species at Risk with a photograph of a Black Bear and a rattlesnake on First Nations land. I found this odd as I knew that Black Bears were not endangered. I continued along Black Sage Road until I reached the Oliver First Nations Band Office. I saw René, Ingrid and Mario attempting to get into the office. It must have been locked for lunch hour. The three walked past me and none of them said a word and I actually had to wait until they got into their truck before I could get into my SUV as the two vehicles were parked side by side.

They drove off. It had to have been between 12:30 and 12:45. For the longest time I didn't know the movements of the three biologists after they left the band office. Did they drop Mario off at the Indian Reserve before René and Ingrid drove to Osoyoos to give their version of what had taken place to Dr. Christine A. Bish-

op, the woman in charge of the chat project? Did René and Ingrid go back to the chat nest before continuing on to Osoyoos? Did René make a cellular call to Dr. Bishop?

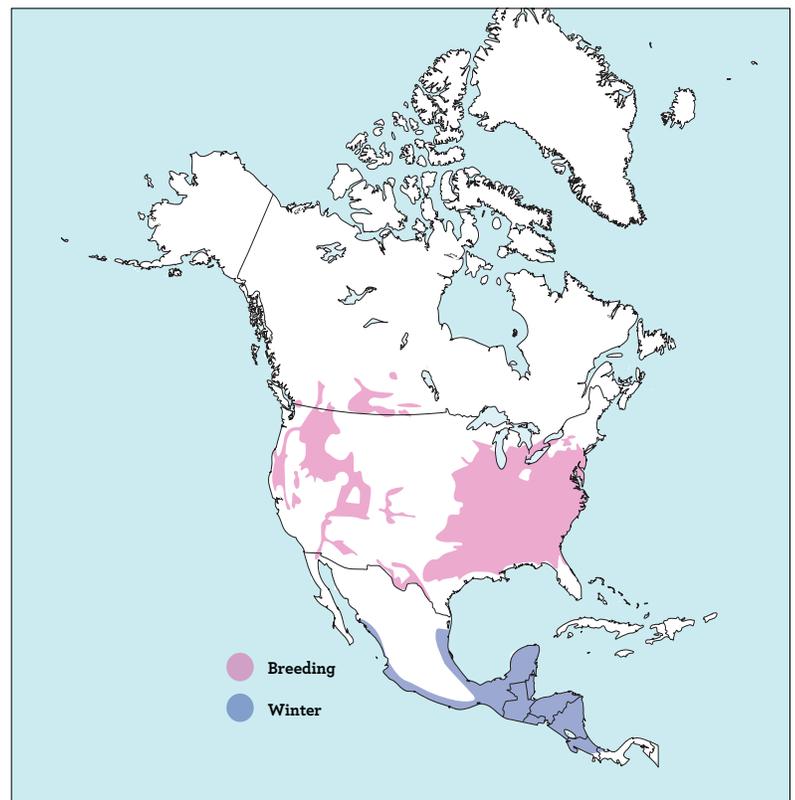
I can't remember exactly when I discovered that I was missing a strobe and tripod. I believe it might have been about the time I was talking to Tina on my cellular phone. I recall calling René on her cellular phone and asking her if Ingrid and her had seen the strobe and tripod when they went in to weigh the chicks as Mario and I were returning to the SUV. She told me that she had not seen them. I explained to her that I'd be reporting the missing items to the police for insurance purposes since their value was in excess of \$700.

I certainly wasn't prepared for what happened next. At 2:14 Dr. Christine A. Bishop, the biologist in charge of the chat recovery program, wrote a very lengthy email about me that contained a great deal of misinformation. She simply jumped the gun. She sent the email to 25 of her associates (listed to the left), none of whom had anything to do with law enforcement, and asked them to spread the word about an "Unethical photographer in the Okanagan". Dick Canning's wife Margaret was the first responder. Based on what Bishop had written about me, Dick felt that "I should be charged or threatened to be charged". His comments no doubt hastened others to jump on the bandwagon and reply about my actions in the Okanagan. I've tried to get a handle on my movements between 12:30 and 6:00 p.m. on the 13 June. I recall leaving the band office and driving back to the scene of the "bust". On the return drive I got out of my SUV and took a photograph of the bear and snake signage that was on Indian land. I also returned to the chat nest area and glassed the scene from a distance with my binoculars looking for my strobe and tripod. They were certainly not at the nest. I recall taking some photos of the Black-headed Grosbeak. I was experimenting with the brand new Canon wireless strobes and had them set at 1/16, 1/32 or 1/64 power in an attempt to catch the parents in full flight. I had been sending emails back and forth to the Canon support team as I was unhappy with any photographs taken of the parent birds in flight. When I purchased the Canon strobes, I'd been told that they could be

operated at full strength with a short flash duration that would stop small birds in full flight.

It was sometime after 6:00 p.m. that a friend of Damon sent him an email saying that a storm was brewing about an "unethical photographer" working in the Okanagan as he believed Damon and I were associated. An earlier anonymous email had been sent to me saying that I was not welcome in the Okanagan and to go home. I hadn't received this message as the Internet had not been hooked up at the guesthouse until after my encounter with René. My son Nathan called me from Mission about this particular email.

On the morning of the 14 June, Tina and I drove to Kelowna to locate some commercial proper-



A map of North America showing the two tiny niches where the chats nest in British Columbia. The chats are not at risk in the tiny "circular" area but apparently are not at risk where the finger points northward into British Columbia and Alberta. They are not a Species at Risk in Alberta, Saskatchewan or the United States. I haven't been able to learn from government officials if the chat was made a Species at Risk in the Okanagan in 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006 or 2007.

ties that Nathan wanted me to photograph from the air. On the trip up I received a call from René saying that my strobe and tripod had been recovered. I told her that I'd like to pick them up from a wildlife office and attempt to explain the events of the previous day. She said she was too busy and insisted that I give her the address of where we were staying and that she'd drop them off the following morning. I gave her the address and on hanging up Tina remarked that she suspected that something was 'fishy' because when I attempted to ask René questions about the recovery of the strobe and tripod she became very defensive.

By this time it was obvious that I was a 'persona non grata' (an unwelcome person) with anyone connected with environmental issues in the Okanagan. On our way back to Summerland, Damon called with the devastating news that the nest of the Black-headed Grosbeak had been predated and that the babies were all dead. Damon explained that he suspected a Gray Squirrel to be the likely culprit as he had seen one the day before not far from the nest. To me, this was a worse case scenario—first my encounter with René followed a day later with the predation of the grosbeak babies. I suspected a possibly different scenario from Damon's theory as we were photographing the Black-headed Grosbeak and the nest of Gray Catbirds not more than 10-feet apart and the two blinds were set up adjacent to each other and the days before Damon, Tina, and I had alternated back and forth between blinds photographing the two nests. The adult birds of both species were coming and going at regular intervals and we were able to chit-chat back and forth to each other through the blind's peep-holes. On one occasion Damon left to look for nests and my wife Tina and I took a spell in the two blinds each photographing the respective birds with Tina using Damon's camera.

A short time after arriving back at the guesthouse from Westbank and Kelowna an actor friend of Damon arrived in his red sports car. Sometime earlier Damon had arranged with Tina's brother for him to stay with us at the farm, as he was one of the actors that was going to participate in the play on the Sicamous. As he drove up to the guesthouse, I greeted him with a big smile and the comment: "I'm the Tasmanian Devil and if you fuck with me I'll

ram my arm up your asshole, grab you by the neck, and fucking-well turn you inside out. Do you understand?" He smiled back and told me that a good actor would never have smiled when delivering such a line. I told him that Damon had called with devastating news about losing a nest and that I wanted to see the site for myself to try to determine just what had happened. I decided to drive out to the scene and invited him to come along with me for the ride. I think this greeting to an absolute stranger was the beginning stages of my mental breakdown.

Birds are very territorial and in 1978 as a very inexperienced bird photographer I'd witnessed a Marsh Wren attack the babies of a pair of Eastern Kingbirds. The kingbird nest was about five feet up in a tree branch that hung over water. I had purchased a 100-foot long electronic cable release that permitted me to fire the camera from a distance. The adult kingbirds were nervous about the equipment but had visited and fed on a few occasions. Because I was trying to burn the candle at both ends, I fell asleep only to awaken to alarm calls from the kingbirds as a wren attacked the babies. I fired the camera and shouted simultaneously and the wren flew away.

I thought that just maybe the catbirds were territorial and had seized an opportunity to kill their neighbours' babies. I carefully examined the chicks one at a time. The largest chick had its skull opened up and its brains eaten, another had its back eaten out, the third had its throat eaten and the runt didn't appear to have any damage. I've asked myself the question several times. Was it weasel, squirrel, another bird species or something else? Like Damon, I suspect it was the squirrel. It was a sad outcome but this scenario plays out daily in the bush. It was a real bad time for Damon and I combined with the events of the previous day. I buried the four babies, knelt down and said a short prayer, and promised that I would try to make their lives on this Earth meaningful.

Roberta Oleniuk, one of the original recipients of Dr. Bishop's email, forwarded the "unethical photographer" letter to Colin Clasen of Coquitlam who quickly managed to get it up on 5 birder blogs. Up until then the only authority was Dr. Bishop. Clasen believed everything in

Dr. Bishop's original email and wanted more than just a pound of my flesh. Not only did he want Damon's book boycotted, he was hoping that he could persuade Dr. Bishop to have us charged. He visited two major bookstores and requested that Damon's book be pulled from the shelves. Clasen suggested that I was caught in the act even though I was driving all over the Okanagan Valley with a Sports Utility Van with Waite Bird Photos Inc., logo, phone number and [www.globalbirdphotos.com](http://www.globalbirdphotos.com) plastered on all four sides. Damon and I were certainly not attempting to hide from anyone. I had a friend that had been through a great deal of hardship in his lifetime and he told me people that know nothing believe anything.

The response to Dr. Bishop's email was immediate from birders. Damon and I began to receive many "hate" letters. They attacked my bird web site unaware that many of the images that they criticized had been taken 25 or more years earlier. Some of them had even been taken when I worked on Triangle Island in 1981 with Dick Cannings and others when I worked with Anthony Gaston, head of seabird research with the Canadian Wildlife Service in 1985. Tony even assisted me photograph seabirds in pitch-blackness on Reef Island at Haida Gwaii. I can only imagine the stress that we caused to those birds. The pupils of their eyes would have been dilated open to let in the almost no light in the tall stands of Western Hemlock on some starless night only to be photographed with my powerful strobes. One blogger made a reference to my son's air photo web site (not aware that it was his and not mine) and suggested a boycott. I told Damon that we had to respond quickly and attempt to explain our actions. Damon wrote a four-page rebuttal letter 'To Whom it May Concern' for uploading to the five birder blogs but as a courtesy I insisted that he send it first to Dr. Bishop to confirm its accuracy. I didn't want to have either of us say something about her that would be going out to a large audience without first making sure that it was 100 % true. He sent out the letter at 8:38 a.m. 15 June by email but Dr. Bishop never responded.

That same morning, 15 June, I got up late and drove out towards the "bust" site to pick up the two A-frames, plywood and the blind from the grosbeak setup but at the midway point I discov-

ered that I was being followed. When I speeded up, the driver of the car behind me speeded up and when I slowed the driver slowed. I had been involved in surveillance work as a policeman and realized that someone was playing a 'cop and robber' game with me. I speeded up, did a quick U-turn in the middle of the highway and waved at the driver as I drove past him in the opposite direction going towards home to get my camera gear. I suspected birders or biologists.

I then drove back out to the site and began to dismantle the grosbeak setup. As I came out of the bush and onto the roadway to my SUV, I happened to notice a couple watching me from Black Sage Road. They were standing beside a car that was parked some distance south of the 22 Road Intersection. I put down the items I'd brought out, removed my camera case from the SUV, and then returned to the grosbeak and catbird nests. I was so focused on what was happening that I literally stepped on a big snake and although mentally exhausted exploded two-feet straight up and sideways away from the snake. Instead of dismantling equipment, I ran like a gorilla as quickly as possible through the dense bush, climbed the steep hill while still in thick vegetation and got in behind the two people that had me under observation. The couple, in their late twenties or early thirties, was standing beside their vehicle watching the driver of a station wagon taking photographs of my SUV. When I casually walked up to them, they jumped into their vehicle and sped off. The driver of the station wagon stopped taking photographs and also sped away. Under the circumstances, I decided to dismantle the setups for both the grosbeak and the catbird and clean up the site and leave.