

# GREEN SCENE

## Where the Birds Are

by Elaine Golds

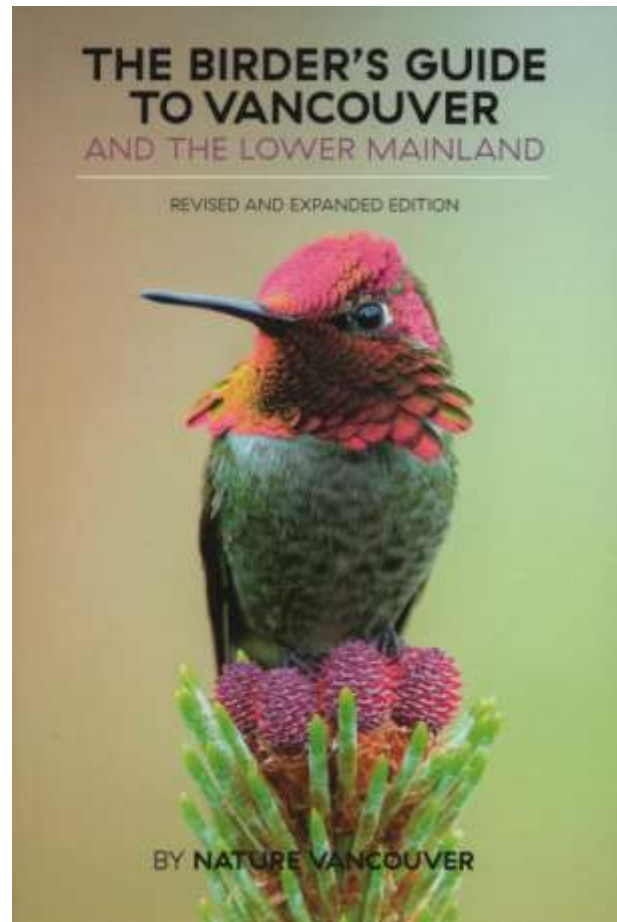
(published by *The Tri-City News* – October 14 2016)

If you are interested in seeing some of the more interesting birds that are found around the lower mainland but don't know where to find them, then this is the book for you. Published this spring, "*The Birder's Guide to Vancouver and the Lower Mainland*" is an eye-catching full-colour update from an earlier and much smaller black and white version released in 2001 by Nature Vancouver, the naturalist group that serves mainly the City of Vancouver.

However, this book covers far more than just Vancouver. This 275 page guide also includes areas in West and North Vancouver, Richmond, Delta, Burnaby, Surrey, Maple Ridge, Pitt Meadows as well as our own Tri-Cities area. To compile all the data, birders from Nature Vancouver relied on assistance from birders throughout the lower mainland including some members of the Burke Mountain Naturalists.

What I find especially appealing about this book (apart from the fantastic photos of birds) are the informative and inviting maps of all the areas described which clearly show access from main roads, where to park, the trail system and washroom locations. I thought I knew most of the good spots for half-day nature walks in the lower mainland but this book has an enticing map of the Burnaby Fraser Foreshore Park, an area I have never visited but will now that I know it exists and what birds to expect to see when I get there. There is even a chapter on birding from BC Ferries which is a really useful addition to this update.

Because the focus of this book is mainly on birding, only two areas in the Tri-Cities are featured – Colony Farm Regional Park and DeBoville Slough/Minnekhada Regional Park. These two areas are terrific sites for birding but they are, of course, not the only ones we have here. Both of these sites have a reputation among birders as being two of the most bird-diverse local sites. Port Moody's Shoreline Park can also provide a good birding experience. However, I expect that Port Moody's Shoreline Park



was omitted because heavy trail use in this area by people and dogs has significantly diminished the possibilities for the more quiet opportunities needed for optimal enjoyment of birds.

In addition to descriptions of thirty-three sites for viewing birds, this book also offers useful information especially for beginning birders. It shows photos of almost ninety of the more unusual birds found here such as the lazuli buntings at Colony Farm Regional Park. There are also tips on bird-watching, photography, tides and how to behave when encountering the occasional bear or cougar. Another very useful feature is the checklist of all the birds in the lower mainland area which shows seasonal abundance – this is an important consideration when deciding where and when to go birding. The seasonal checklist is conveniently split into two lists – one of the common and regularly-occurring birds plus a second list of the birds it can be quite unusual to see or, in birder's parlance, the "casual and accidental" list.

To give this guide a little test, I tried to find out local information about the Wilson's phalarope, an unusual shorebird which, according to most bird books you might consult, should not be found in the lower mainland. Sure enough, this phalarope was not even listed in the casual and accidental list of birds in the guide. However, the index of the guide has a listing and a quick read of the appropriate page indicates that, although not a common bird, the Wilson's phalarope is indeed found on Iona Island near the sewage ponds every spring. (Perhaps, this was a mistaken omission from the casual/accidental list?) Of course, every keen birder knows the ponds at the Iona Sewage Treatment Plant are a hot spot for unusual birds. I think this example shows the strength of this guide and illustrates how using knowledge from experienced local birders can result in such an informative book. It makes this guide a real go-to book not only for information about good birding sites but also exactly where and when some really uncommon birds might be found.

I highly recommend this book to birders of all levels of experience. It is now available in local stores and from popular online sources as well. And, although it sounds strange, grab your binoculars and get out to those sewage ponds at Iona – after all, they are actually one of west coast's premier birding locations!