

CURRENT STATUS OF THE BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLER IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

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In North America, the Black-throated Blue Warbler (*Dendroica caerulescens*) breeds in hardwood forests in a narrow strip of southern Canada from Nova Scotia west to the Manitoba border and in adjacent areas of the northeastern United States southward in a narrow band along the Appalachian Mountains to northern Georgia. Its primary wintering range includes the Greater Antilles and the Bahamas, plus adjacent regions of coastal Central America in Mexico, Belize, and Honduras (Holmes 1994).

Vagrants have been recorded well outside the species' normal range including California (634 records, Dunn and Garrett 1997) and British Columbia (six records, Campbell et al. 2001). The purpose of this note is to update the occurrences for British Columbia and revise the status of the Black-throated Blue Warbler in British Columbia.

Change in Status

Munro and McTaggart-Cowan (1947) do not include the Black-throated Blue Warbler among the avifauna of British Columbia. The first record for the province occurred in 1984 (Davidson and Van Damme 1987) and since then, through 2005, an additional 14 records have been reported, providing an elevated seasonal status for both the coast and interior of British Columbia.

Occurrence

The first occurrence of this species in British Columbia was 22 September 1984 when a male was observed near the wildlife centre at the Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area (Davidson and Van Damme 1987). Perhaps this record was overdue, since California was averaging over 20 records per year by the late 1970s (Roberson 1980).

There have now been a total of 15 records in British Columbia. All but two of these were birds that appeared briefly and were not seen again. Two

were able to adapt to winter in British Columbia and remained for a prolonged period. On 12 December 1993 a male appeared at the feeder of Lucille Wells in Nakusp (Figure 1). In addition to feeding on a suet and fish food mixture, the warbler fed on apples remaining in the local trees, and spent time foraging with Black-capped Chickadees (*Poecile atricapillus*). The skin of the apples was apparently too tough for the warbler to pierce but it learned to feed from apples opened by Northern Flickers (*Colaptes auratus*). Later in the winter it moved to a feeder at the home of Dave Grimshire, just three blocks away. It became quite aggressive in defense of this feeder and was observed several times chasing away a Yellow-rumped Warbler (*Dendroica coronata*) (D. Grimshire, pers. comm.). Unfortunately, it flew into a plate glass window on 16 January 1984 and died. The carcass was preserved as a museum specimen at the Cowan Vertebrate Museum at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver (UBC 15172).



Figure 1. Male Black-throated Blue Warbler at a suet feeder in Nakusp, BC. 22 December 1993 (Gary S. Davidson). BC Photo 2012.

On 20 November 2000, a male appeared at a feeder in Balfour operated by Gene and Agnes De Mott. The suet pudding provided here included raisins and oatmeal. This bird also adapted to feeder life and remained in the region continuously until 21 April 2001 (G. De Mott, pers. comm.).

With the exception of the Gagnon Creek bird, all sightings have been in extreme southern British Columbia (Figure 2). Eleven of the 15 occurrences have been in the autumn or early winter from 13

different locations (Table 1).

Current Status

Following definitions in Campbell et al. (1990, p. 148-149), the Black-throated Blue Warbler can be considered accidental in spring, casual in summer, and accidental in autumn on the coast. In the interior, the species is casual in spring and summer, very rare in autumn, and casual in winter. Annual chronology is summarized in Figure 3. There are no breeding records.

Remarks

It is difficult to speculate on the origin of the British Columbia birds. All records have occurred within the last 20 years, yet during this same period there has been no increase in the number of California records each year (D. Roberson pers. comm.). To date, Oregon has had about 40 records (Schmidt 1989, Gilligan 1994) and Washington nine records (Wahl 2005, S. Mlodinow, pers. comm.). In Canada, Manitoba is closest to the known breeding range for this species but there have been no confirmed breeding records in that province and sight records occur only about twice per year. Well over one-half of Manitoba's approximately 75 records have occurred in September and October, while 23 records were reported in May (Manitoba Avian Research Committee 2003). This suggests that the Black-throated Blue Warbler is primarily a migrant in Manitoba. Although Saskatchewan has had fewer total records than Manitoba, there is a small but isolated breeding population there (Smith 1996). Alberta had 11 records by 1980 (Pinel 1993) with perhaps 20 more since then. Like other regions of western Canada, most of these records have been in the autumn.

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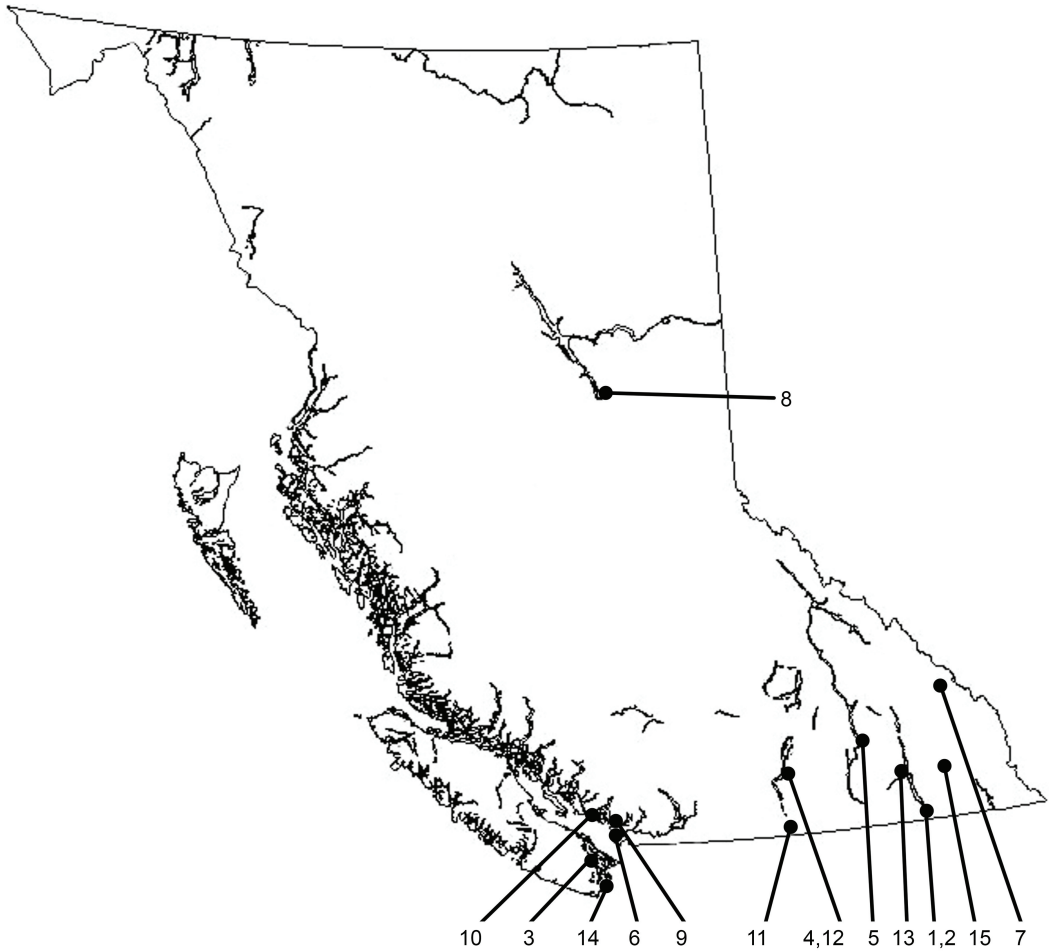


Figure 2. Locations of confirmed occurrences of the Black-throated Blue Warbler in British Columbia, 1984 through 2005. Numbers correspond to locations in Table 1.



Figure 3. Occurrence chronology of Black-throated Blue Warbler in British Columbia, 1984 - 2005.

Table 1. Chronological order of all documented records for the Black-throated Blue Warbler in British Columbia. Numbers correspond with those shown in Figure 2.

No.	Record details	No.	Record details
1	Creston: One male was resting in riparian shrubbery at the Interpretation Centre in the Wildlife Management Area on 22 September 1984 (Davidson and Van Damme 1987; BC Photo 937).	9	Cypress Park, West Vancouver: One reported by Colin Bowen on 25 June 1997.
2	Creston: One male was watched foraging in riparian shrubs in the vicinity of the 1984 sighting on 1 and 2 October 1985 (Campbell et al. 2001).	10	Roberts Creek, Sunshine Coast: One female observed by Edgar T. Jones on 10 August 1998.
3	Maple Bay, Vancouver Island: A male was seen foraging in Douglas-firs (<i>Pseudotsuga menziesii</i>) in a residential backyard on 25 and 27 November 1987 (Campbell et al. 2001).	11	Osoyoos Lake: One male found in riparian shrubs at the north end by Len Jellicoe on 10 October 1998.
4	Mission Creek, Kelowna: One male was spotted in a migrating flock of Yellow rumped Warblers (<i>Dendroica coronata auduboni</i>) and Townsend's Warblers (<i>Dendroica townsendi</i>) on 2 October 1988 (Campbell et al. 2001).	12	Kelowna: One reported by Al Gemmill on 10 October 1998.
5	Nakusp: One male visiting suet feeders at the homes of Lucille Wells and Dave Grimshire from 12 December 1993 to 16 January 1994 (BC Photo 2012).	13	Balfour. One male regularly visited the feeders of Gene and Agnes De Mott from 20 November 2000 to 21 April 2001.
6	Point Grey, Vancouver: One male was found singing from deciduous trees in the University of British Columbia Endowment Lands by Karen L. Wiebe on 20 April 1994 (Davidson 1995).	14	Victoria: One male was observed by David Allinson on 28 June 2002.
7	Big Fish Lake: One observed carefully by Lorne Russell on 30 June 1995 northwest of Invermere.	15	Kimberley: One male briefly visited the feeder of Ruth Goodwin on 11 December 2002. It did not remain in the area.
8	Gagnon Creek, MacKenzie: One male heard and subsequently seen at a banding station by Rinchen Boardman on 14 August 1995.		

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About the Author

Gary's interest in birds began as a university student in Vancouver. After spending 1973 and 1974 in Fort Nelson, he and his wife Marie moved to Nakusp where they have lived ever since. He has been conducting bird surveys and coordinating Christmas Bird Counts for over 30 years. He is an active participant in the British Columbia Nest Record Scheme. He also served as chair of the British Columbia Field Ornithologists Birds Records Committee for six years.

He has made four trips to Australia, one of which was to work as a birding guide at a birdwatcher's lodge in northern Queensland. He retired in June 2005 from teaching high school mathematics and looks forward to many more years of travelling and birding.