

The Next Generation of BC Birders

The current birding scene encompasses many diverse youth. We must strive to be as inclusive as possible and do the work to make every birder, no matter their race, gender identity or sexual orientation to feel welcome.

BY MELISSA HAFTING

Melissa runs the British Columbia Rare Bird Alert website. She is also the founder of the British Columbia Young Birders Program, which aims to bring together youth of all races, sexual orientations and genders for fun excursions in the natural world. Originally from Vancouver, BC. Melissa has a strong passion for wildlife conservation, is an eBird reviewer for the province, and loves to travel while also looking at birds.

When I began the Young Birders Program in 2014, I was inspired by the passion that these youth had for birds. As I brought them together and began to take them on field trips throughout the province I was inspired to see their love of conservation shine through. Many of the youth came out of their shell, made long-lasting friends and honed their id skills. I watched with a sense of pride as they began to carve out plans for their environmental and ornithological careers. I was equally proud of those who chose to tell conservation stories through their photography. Often it takes a photo for people to see what harm is being done to the natural world. It subsequently helps, to highlight, why often rapid action is needed to correct the problem.

Now in 2021, birding is “The IN” or fashionable thing to do. It wasn’t always this way, but our hobby has

evolved from being a so-called “nerdy” passion to a cool one. The current birding scene encompasses many diverse youth. The cultural diversity of these youth is the new face of birding. We must strive to be as inclusive as possible and do the work, to make every birder, no matter their race, gender identity or sexual orientation to feel welcome. As a Black woman birder, I can speak from experience that this hobby which has traditionally been helmed by white men, hasn’t always been welcoming. It is no longer enough to assume BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and people of colour) birders feel welcome. We need to actively do the work to ensure they are.

The good thing is that the next generation of birders are go-getters. They show up, are inclusive, diverse themselves and want to make every birder feel welcome. Here is to more

of this going forward. Birding groups, committees and organizations can learn a lot from these youth, whom are making our very diverse world a more equitable and safe place for birders and naturalists.

As you read through the profiles of these amazing youth, I hope you will support them and try to be a mentor to other young people in your own communities. These youth are our future. They are already making our planet a better place to live due to their stewardship. They continue to inspire me and fill my heart with joy. These youth have left an indelible mark on my life and changed it for the better. I know that once you read about these youth, you will also be convinced, that they have shone a bright light on the BC Birding scene.

Enjoy!

Melissa Hafting led many of BC’s young birders to bright conservation-focused future through field trips and nature education.

Photo by Alice Sun.



EVAN LARSON

LOCATION: Vancouver, BC

EBIRD PROFILE: ebird.org/profile/MTE5MDUyNg

FAVOURITE BIRD: American Dipper

BIRD PHOTO: Bald Eagle

WHY DO I LOVE BIRDS?

I love birding because birds are the most delightful, graceful, and beautiful creatures on this planet and birding allows me to spend lots of time observing these amazing animals.



ABOUT ME: I'm a 16 year old birder. I became interested in birds in the fall of 2017 when I picked up my dad's old Birds of BC field guide and started flipping through the pages, learning about all the birds in our beautiful province. I quickly became fascinated with birds and decided to go to Reifel Bird Sanctuary in Delta one Saturday morning in order to see how many birds I could find. At that moment the magical world of birds revealed itself to me and I was totally hooked! Birds have become a big part of my life and it just brings me so much joy to search for and observe our wonderful feathered friends.

In the last year or two, I started using eBird daily and I absolutely love it because it organizes all my observations, checklists, and photos and helps ornithologists gain a greater understanding of the global distribution of birds. I also love to photograph birds because it gives you the ability to capture a bird in a moment - and a photo can help you cherish a memory you made with the bird. Photography also adds a new challenge to birding which I find enjoyable, and there is nothing more satisfying than taking a fantastic bird photo.

KALIN OCAÑA

LOCATION: Kelowna, BC

INSTAGRAM: [@birdz.okanagan](https://www.instagram.com/birdz.okanagan)

EBIRD PROFILE: ebird.org/profile/Nzc1NjY1/CA-BC-CO

FAVOURITE BIRD: My favourite bird, like that of most birders, is changing constantly but for now I will say Rusty Blackbird. This winter, I have spent a lot of time with a female Rusty blackbird, following her through swampy thickets and down meandering creeks, lined with ice and snow. Rusties are a fascinating species since they are threatened. They are also a species with a lot



of mystery shrouding their life history, which makes them all the more fascinating to observe in my opinion.

BIRD PHOTO: Rusty Blackbird

WHY DO I LOVE BIRDS?

Birds and birding are such a central part of my life that it is hard to separate myself from them. I love birds for the lessons they have taught me while exploring nature, and the moments I have shared with them throughout my childhood and adolescence. Spending

time with birds can be both thrilling and therapeutic. Whether my goal is to get the best possible photo, or just to sit and watch as they take in the land around them, there is plenty to love from every angle of birding.

ABOUT ME: I am a 17 year old birder and, growing up, birds have been an ever-present aspect of my life. However, I only became an active member of the birding community in 2016.

After joining the Central Okanagan Naturalist Club, I learned how and where to actually find the species I desired to locate, rather than just bumping into them by chance in my local patch of woods. Then, I met Melissa at a Little Gull twitch in Penticton and she got me into her BC's Young Birder Program. She's been a great mentor to me.

After I got started birding, I didn't stop and continued to improve my skill in the field, applying all that I had formerly learned from exploring West Kelowna's backcountry and on Melissa's awesome field trips. On one field trip she got me my lifer Great Gray and Burrowing Owl.

As far as conservation goes, you can regularly find me fighting to protect patches of wilderness around my town from developers wishing to push for more cookie-cutter houses in areas that should be left the way that the rivers, mountains, plants and wildlife have sculpted them over thousands of years.

For the longest time finding a career related to birding was a huge aspiration for myself, however recently I've come to the conclusion that getting paid to be a birder is a lot more difficult than I'd like it to be. Courses like physics, chemistry and calculus have just never agreed with me.

My main passion, aside from the natural world, is listening to people's stories and giving them guidance on

healing from trauma and making positive changes in their lives. So, to keep my doors open, I hope to complete my Bachelor's degree in the Arts. From here, I will be able to branch out into whatever feels right, be it Geography, Social Work, or anything in between.

LIRON GERTSMAN

LOCATION: Vancouver, BC

WEBSITE: www.lirongertsman.com

INSTAGRAM: [@liron_gertsman_](https://www.instagram.com/liron_gertsman_) photography

EBIRD PROFILE: ebird.org/profile/MzA0MzYx/CA-BC

FAVOURITE BIRD: The Arctic Tern!

Everything about their migration and lifestyle just blows me away.

BIRD PHOTO: Sandhill Cranes

WHY DO I LOVE BIRDS?

Everything about birds fascinates me. Their displays, migrations, flight, calls, and feather details are an endless source of inspiration and awe. Beyond their traits, I love their birds for their ability to connect people to nature, and inspire conservation.

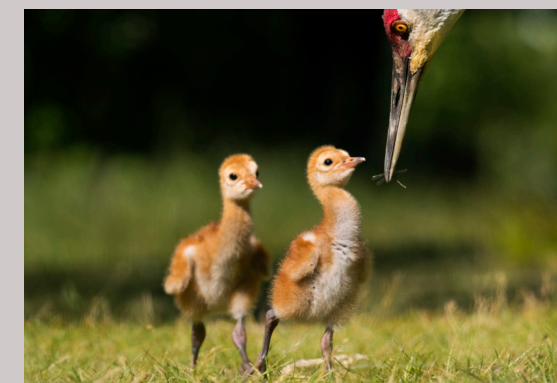
ABOUT ME: For as long I can remember, I've had a deep interest and engagement with nature. Around the age 5, I began to take a particular interest in the birds that I would see around my neighborhood. I became a volunteer bird monitor at the age of 9, participating in bird counts in Vancouver's Stanley Park, and beyond. At 11, I joined eBird, and have since submitted over 5500 checklists as a citizen scientist. Around the same time, I participated in my first Christmas Bird Count, and I'm now the area leader for my local count.

In 2014, my ornithology skills expanded, as I attended Birds Canada's Doug Tarry Young Ornithologists Workshop, followed by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's young birder pro

gram a few years later. Conservation is incredibly important to me, and I've raised thousands of dollars annually for bird research and conservation as part of Birds Canada's Great Canadian Birdathon, which I've participated in every year since 2013.

Currently, I'm a volunteer monitor for Birds Canada's Coastal Waterbird Survey, and am a member of the City of Vancouver's Bird Advisory Committee.

In addition to birding and bird monitoring, I'm a passionate bird and nature photographer. My photo-



graphs have been displayed in museums around the world, including the Natural History Museum in London, England and the Smithsonian in Washington DC. I am 20 and currently study biology at the University of British Columbia as I continue to build upon my passion and commitment to the environment.

CAMERON MONTGOMERY



LOCATION: Burnaby, BC
FAVOURITE BIRD: Wilson's Phalarope
EBIRD PROFILE: ebird.org/profile/MTQzMjc4NA
INSTAGRAM: @cam_m_photography
BIRD PHOTO: Ash-throated Flycatcher
WHY DO I LOVE BIRDS?:
 Because I love the variety of species that can be found anywhere you look. Any bird species is a great example of the beautiful things that nature can create.

ABOUT ME: I'm a 15 year old birder and amateur bird photographer. I've always been fascinated by all different types of animals, but birds were always my favourite. I started getting into birding a few years ago, when I was fascinated by a Pileated Woodpecker on my way to school. This led to my desire to search for and photograph all kinds of birds, common or rare. I remember the excitement of looking through my first field guide and finding out how many beautiful and interesting birds live right here in Vancouver. I especially remember looking through the gull section of the book and thinking they all look the same. Now that I am more experienced with bird identification, I can tell many gulls apart and it is a great reminder of how far I have come and the experience I have gained in the birding world. Melissa frequently helps me with bird IDs that I stumble on to, which has been very helpful. Since I started birding,

I have been able to travel to places such as BC's Interior, Manitoba, and Hawaii. Birding has also been a great way to get outside and explore. I have been to many places in my own city that I would not have known about without birding.

When I discovered eBird, I was amazed at how useful it is. I submit my sightings to eBird on a regular basis.

eBird and the BC Rare Bird Alert helps me find the birds I want to see and eBird is a great place for me to share my photos for others to enjoy.

JAMES PARK

LOCATION: North Vancouver, BC
FAVOURITE BIRD: Smew
EBIRD PROFILE: ebird.org/canada/profile/MTcxNjQxNQ
INSTAGRAM: @james_park_0704
BIRD PHOTO: Ash-throated Flycatcher



WHY DO I LOVE BIRDS?
 Because it is very exciting to watch the many behaviours of birds and the excitement that comes from finding or identifying unusual birds. The other reason I love birding is because birding gives me knowledge of the relationship between humans and nature.

ABOUT ME: My name is James. I am a 13 year old birder in grade 8. I came here a year ago as an international student from South Korea.

I have always loved everything that belonged to nature since I was a little child. I started to get interested in watching small birds around my house since I was seven. I always watched them fly, run, and sing around my house with small binoculars and a small point and shoot camera. After several months, my mom bought me my first field guide. Since then, I spent almost the whole day, everyday looking at my field guide when I was at home.

Soon, I became very eager to identify and find all those species in my field guide in the wild. I started to walk to all the parks near my house to find specific target birds with my binoculars.

Within several years, I traveled to many birding places in South Korea. I observed and photographed many seriously endangered species in South Korea like the Saunders's gull or Black-faced spoonbills.

I was lucky to be born in such a great peninsula full of unique endangered species. However, I could not do many birding activities in South Korea because there were not many birding groups in South Korea, especially for young birders like me. That is why I was so happy when I met Melissa who has helped me find so many new birds. One special moment was seeing my first-ever Barn Owl with her! It is such a cool looking owl.

First, I should explain that after 6 years of living in South Korea, I came

to Canada. I started birding here in July 2020. When I first came here, I was confused by many new species but I learned them quickly with very helpful eBird, Melissa and my new field guide. After a few months, I was introduced to real birding and local birding communities here. Since then, I was involved.

I tried to get involved in some birding activities including several bird walks, Melissa's young birder program, Christmas bird counts, and bird banding (but all were canceled due to COVID-19). As soon as the pandemic ends, I am willing to attend as many birding programs as I can!. I am interested in the migration of birds and their behaviour. I am also interested in the conservation of East Asian birds (especially shorebirds and songbirds) and I really enjoy birding in my local patch of Maplewood Flats!.

DANIEL GRACA

LOCATION: Surrey, BC
FAVOURITE BIRD: It was hard for me to choose but I think Anna's and Rufous Hummingbirds are my favourites.
BIRD PHOTO: Lazuli Bunting. I love the diversity of all the species we have here in BC and I love a good I.D. challenge.
WHY DO I LOVE BIRDS?:

To me, birding is very exciting because when you go out you never know what birds you will find. It's also relaxing and peaceful when you are out in nature.

ABOUT ME: I'm a 13 year old young birder, and I have loved everything about birds ever since I was little, when I would go camping with my family I would be amazed by all the different birds. I would also go out to my local parks to feed the ducks and chickadees with my mom. I started bird pho-

tography in 2016 just for fun, and in recent years I have taken a bigger interest in it. My favourite time to go birding is in the spring. I regularly submit sighting and photos to eBird, and I have raised money for the Canadian Wildlife Federation and Orphaned Wildlife Rehabilitation Society (OWL). I follow the BC Rare Bird Alert Melissa runs to find rarities. I really like going out to twitch a rare bird because to me its like a test for your skills to see if you can find the rare bird. I also like hybrids because sometimes they are like a perfect cross between 2 species. I have





FLICKR: flickr.com/photos/143935675@N03
INSTAGRAM: @naturemma_
BIRD PHOTO: Rufous Hummingbird in Victoria
WHY DO I LOVE BIRDS?
 I love birds and birding because it is an activity that I can do anytime and anywhere when I have the chance plus there is so much diversity between species. Birds are fascinating, and I love being able to contribute to ornithological research by helping out at the banding station and using eBird!.

ABOUT ME: I am a 21 year old birder. I have always been interested in nature from a very young age. After a trip to the Okanagan at age 10, I really got hooked into birding. Since then I have participated twice in the Meadowlark Nature Festival's Okanagan Big day, as well as many Christmas Bird Counts on southern Vancouver Island. I am a classical violinist and currently in my final semester of the Bachelor of Music Performance program at the University of Ottawa. During the late spring and summer, I volunteer as much as I can at the Rocky Point Bird Observatory in Metchosin, BC. In 2020, I did two Big Days entirely on foot; one in my neighbourhood in Victoria for the Great Canadian Birdathon, and one where I currently live in Ottawa for the October Big Day. Both of these big days involved walking more than 15 kms each. I hope to go on more birding trips, as soon as it is safe to do so. However, since the pandemic began, I've gained even more appreciation for the local birds of both Victoria and Ottawa.



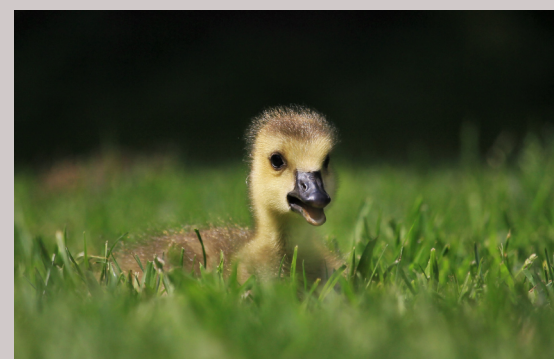
travelled with my family to Europe, Mexico, and the USA to see birds.

EMMA READER-LEE

LOCATION: Victoria, BC
FAVOURITE BIRD: It's so difficult to choose, as I have so many!, but I have a special place in my heart for the West Indian Whistling-Duck
EBIRD PROFILE: ebird.org/profile/Mz-gyMzcw
INATURALIST PROFILE: inaturalist.ca/observations?user_id=nature_em

FAVOURITE BIRD: Canada Goose but I love waterfowl.
EBIRD PROFILE: ebird.org/profile/Nzc2Mzc1
FLICKR: flickr.com/photos/144379173@N02
BIRD PHOTO: Gosling
WHY DO I LOVE BIRDS?
 I love birding because I enjoy being out in nature where it is peaceful and I find bird behavior fascinating.

ABOUT ME: I am a 21 year old birder. I have always been interested in birds and nature ever since I can remember,



but it all started when I was 7 and my parents gave me their old binoculars and a field guide to the birds of southwestern BC. I started spending nearly all my free time roaming around our 9-acre property trying to identify all the birds I saw. My dream was to see all the species in that guide. I still haven't seen them all.

Then in 2016, I discovered Melissa Hafting's young birder program and eagerly joined this group of enthusiastic young birders. I learned a lot about bird identification, discovered the world of birders, and made a lot of great memories and friends in those years. Three years ago, I starting doing bird counts for the Langley field naturalists at two of their study sites and I still continue to do so, contributing all of my checklists to eBird as well.

I continue to enjoy birding on the weekends, mostly locally but I also enjoy twitching rarities all around the lower mainland. Birding really helped me to become aware of how everything we do as humans affects the birds and all of the nature around us. I was raised in and continue to work in agriculture and I believe a keen awareness of this helps us to make responsible decisions in everyday life.

TOBY THERIAULT

LOCATION: Tofino, BC
FAVOURITE BIRD: I don't have a favourite bird. But I do have a list of birds that I "dislike" the most for avoiding me after I have spent a ridiculous amount of time looking for them. I would give an arm and a leg to see these three: White tailed Ptarmigan, White-cheeked Starling, Horned Puffin
BIRD PHOTO: Brandt's Cormorant
WHY DO I LOVE BIRDS?
 Birding in my opinion has never been at all similar to the way it is portrayed

in popular culture. I see it as an exciting sport that can be as interesting or competitive as you want it to be. Birding is a good way to connect to the world around you, and a interesting looking glass to gauge human impacts on our environment. It is also fun, as it has the aspect of excitement and mystery. The way I see birding is as something just as interesting as professional sports or arts, but depending less on the opinion of others. I believe that starting birding in high school was the most punk rock thing I have ever done. I enjoy being myself and I refuse to listen to anyone that tells me how to do that; so at an impressionable time in my life I decided to do the thing that everyone expected me not to do. What twelve year old decides to not focus on sports and popularity but discovers ornithology? Honesty, I've never been more happy that I did.

ABOUT ME: As someone whose spent their whole life in and around nature on the west coast I believe that my love for the environment came naturally. I like to enjoy the places that I'm into the fullest and that means knowing about its ecosystems. I became interested in birding when I saw Jack Black in The Big Year. Being a person whose always seeking excitement, I decided to challenge myself to follow his footsteps and have as much fun with it as I could. I was in the CBC documentary film *Rare Bird Alert* alongside one of my mentors and young birder program founder, Melissa Hafting.

After my big year I became trapped in what I believe will be a life-long interest in ornithology, the excitement of birding, and the beautiful, magical creatures that we call birds. Not only have I been an avid birder since I was eleven; I have also been acutely aware of the urgent threat that climate change has put on my future. I enjoy nature beyond good reason. My life which



includes birding, surfing, skiing; even my interest in art and my home; are entirely dependent on the protection of the environment. I intend to devote my entire future protecting the environment.

RAYMOND LIU

LOCATION: Richmond, BC
FAVOURITE BIRD: Honestly, I don't really have a favourite bird, because I think all birds are unique and extraordinary in their own way, but if I really had to choose, it would probably be an Amer-



ican Avocet, because it's so graceful and beautiful. Plus it has always been one of my dream birds to see.

EBIRD PROFILE: ebird.org/profile/MT-M1NDcwOA/CA-BC-GV

BIRD PHOTO Belted Kingfisher at Terra Nova Park

WHY DO I LOVE BIRDS?

I got interested in birding when I was

about 9 years old. I've always loved being in nature and I was obsessed with different kinds of animals. It all started when I saw a bird book in the library and I was very impressed by all the different species you could find in BC and so I started my new hobby: Birdwatching. I love birding because I think it's a great way to relax and enjoy yourself outside and I also think that birds are so amazing to watch. One of the other things I like about birding is you get to record your sightings on eBird and you can have life and year lists also, which makes it fun to find certain bird species. Melissa has helped me tremendously in my local city park to identify birds and I like following her BC Rare Bird Alert blog. Whenever my mom is able, she takes me to see a rarity when it's in my city. ♀

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Thank you, Wild Birds Unlimited!



The Wild Bird Trust of BC and Wild Birds Unlimited are providing a \$200 certificate for the young birders presented in Melissa Hafting's feature. We are also providing a complimentary annual membership.



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