

## **BMN Hikers Begin a New Season - Pitt Wildlife Management Area**

### **Trip Report by Mark Johnston**

The BMN hikers began a new season on Sunday, February 24, with a hike in the Pitt Wildlife Management Area. We had good weather: lots of sunshine, some high cloud, generally a warmth in the air (although whenever the cloud prevailed, still a touch of winter's chill!). There were eight participants, with six of us going the distance.

We started our hike at the intersection of Rannie and Koerner roads. From there, our route took us west to the Pitt River Dyke; then northeast to Grant Narrows; then in a big loop via the Nature, Mountainside, and Snake Rock dykes back to Koerner Road. We covered about 15 km in all.

As a few of us waited at Rannie and Koerner for the rest of our group to arrive, we saw four trumpeter swans flying northeastward just overhead. This proved to be a taste of things to come. Later, when we walked along the Nature Dyke, we peered through leafless vegetation out over Katzie Marsh and saw huge numbers of swans: half or more with their heads and necks held high; the rest appearing as so many steppingstones, their heads and necks underwater. I made a rough count and came up with 160, but I imagine there were more. Later still, as we walked along the Mountainside Dyke, we were fortunate to be able to look on as—very close at hand—a group of six swans took off single-file from nearby open water and flew northward, undoubtedly to join their numerous kind at Katzie Marsh.

Sighting swans was just one of several birding highlights. Shortly after we started—on our way out to the Pitt River Dyke—we caught sight of three swallows as they soared and chirped just above us. Although we watched for some time, we weren't able to identify their species with certainty. They may have been tree or violet-green.

Upon reaching the Pitt River Dyke, we were able to spot the same osprey nest high atop a power pylon that I had seen last spring. But as yet, there wasn't any activity. Farther along, we paused to observe a red-throated loon, which was in non-breeding plumage. I remembered sighting such a loon in about the same place when I walked the dyke last year.

Midway along the Nature Dyke, we stopped to watch a small woodpecker, which was going about its business just a couple of metres above our heads. Including our group, a small crowd collected, but the woodpecker—the consensus was that it was a hairy—didn't seem bothered in the least. We looked on and took pictures for quite awhile, and when we left, the bird was still preoccupied!

Our pace throughout the day was leisurely, allowing plenty of time for observation. We saw eagles fly overhead, heard towhees and song sparrows sing, watched as a distant flock of shorebirds flitted this way and that, and noted numerous duck species, including

green-winged teal, mallard, northern pintail, and gadwall. As we walked along Koerner Road on the final stretch of our hike, we saw the decomposing carcass of (apparently) a sheep on one side, and had a good look at a couple of ravens picking through a farmer's field on the other.

It wasn't just about the birds. We probably spent an equal amount of time enjoying the spectacular scenery all around. We thrilled to see the cascading waterfalls tumbling down Burke Mountain, took the time to identify the snowbound hanging valley of Widgeon Lake, and were drawn time and again to contemplate Golden Ears' snow-capped heights. Not surprisingly, we spent a lot of time taking pictures!

All in all, a great start to a new season!

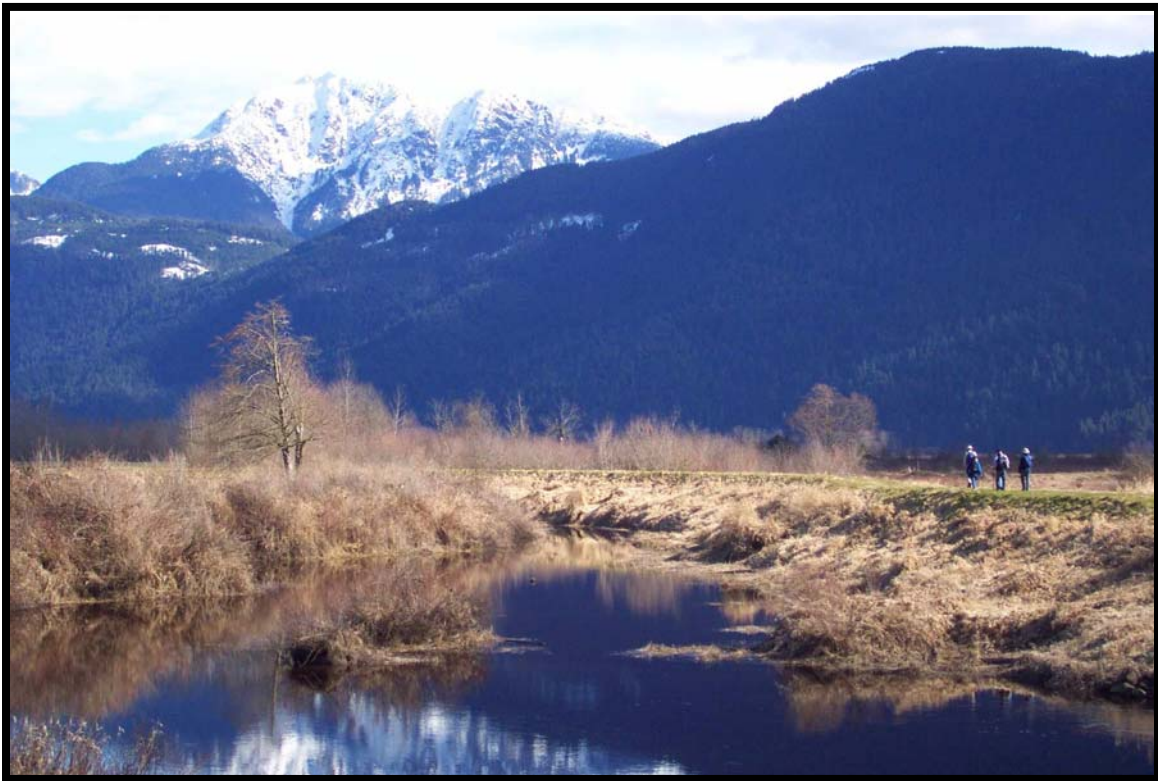


Photo by Ian McArthur

**The Pitt River Dyke with Golden Ears in the background.**