



A great blue heron glides through the sunlight.

Photo courtesy Shayne Kaye

BC Bird Trail launches new app

By **MATTHEW CHEUNG**
Reporter

The BC Bird Trail has launched a brand new BC Bird Trail Mobile Experience app, a free tool to help birdwatchers of all levels discover the best birding hotspots in communities around B.C.

BC Bird Trail launched publicly in September 2020. The project is funded and managed by tourism and conservation partners throughout the province including Tourism Richmond, Birds Canada, and Destination BC. It is the leading source of information on attractions, activities, and accommodations related to birdwatching in the province.

The new application, which is free for users, was released in late October, during the peak fall birding season. Users can follow self-guided itineraries, plan out trips, and track birding progress through points and badges alongside other birders as they visit different regions.

"We're all particularly excited for amateur wildlife explorers and seasoned birders, from B.C. and beyond, to interact with this new and improved birdwatching tool developed by our team at the BC Bird Trail Mobile Experience," says Ceri Chong, director of destination and industry development at Tourism Richmond. "With birdwatching continuing to grow in popularity year over year—especially amongst a younger, more diverse demographic than ever before—this new app is an excellent resource and intuitive guide for making the most of each and every birding adventure for birdwatchers of all ages, backgrounds, and experience levels."

Birdwatching has grown significantly since the beginning of the pandemic as people seek ways to spend time outside. The BC Bird Trail spans five regions: The BC Bird Trail spans five regions: Central Vancouver Island, Columbia Valley, South Fraser, Fraser Valley, and Sea to Sky, plus two outposts in Langford and Osoyoos.

The Central Vancouver Island region is comprised of Nanaimo, Cowichan, and Parksville Qualicum Beach. The region contains a wide variety of birding hotspots that are nestled safely along the Strait of Georgia.

The Columbia Valley trail is located be-

tween the Rocky and Purcell Mountains, a short trip from Alberta. It includes cities like Cranbrook, Radium, Invermere, Kimberley, and Golden, and is perfect for those who enjoy watching the sunset and camping.

The Fraser Valley trail runs through Langley, Abbotsford, Chilliwack, and the Harrison River Valley. Over 200 species of birds visit the trail region annually.

The recently established Sea to Sky bird trail runs through Squamish and Whistler. Home to wintering bald eagles and Canada jays, the trail features many high-altitude specialties. There is even the possibility of hearing the high-pitched call of the local hoary marmot.

The South Fraser trail consists of Richmond, Surrey, and Delta. Richmond, recognized as the heart of the Pacific Flyway and a central hub for travellers throughout B.C., is home to a plethora of migratory birds.

"The bird migration superhighway sees millions of birds pass through the region throughout the year. From October to April, snow geese are amongst the most abundant, (and) we are also fortunate to see a large number of other species as well, such as bald eagles, Western sandpipers, and tree swallows," says Liron Gertsman, a birding expert in Richmond.

Location, time of day, and time of year are important factors to think about for optimal birdwatching, as well as having the right tools. With Richmond's diverse selection of birds throughout the year, birders should also make note of the distinction between migrating birds and year-round ones.

"The more time you spend in bird habitats, the more you'll see and the more you'll learn and advance your skills," says Gertsman. "In Richmond, we've got great access to birding hotspots without having to travel very far. A pair of binoculars is a great tool for spotting and identifying birds, as well as free resources that can help improve your experience, such as the BC Bird Trail, ebird.org, and the Merlin Bird ID App. If you want to enrich your birding experience or learn from an expert, consider taking a birding tour or participating in a bird walk."

For more information on the BC Bird Trail, visit bcbirdtrail.ca

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– Ceri Chong