

Vancouver Bird Week - Final Report



Prepared for:
Vancouver Bird Advisory Committee, City of Vancouver

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Introduction

Vancouver Bird Week is a series of events held annually in the second week of May to celebrate and raise awareness for birds. In 2014, Bird Week officially ran from May 3rd to May 10th. This was Vancouver's second annual Bird Week and fourth year celebrating World Migratory Bird Day, a United Nations-sponsored initiative that began globally in 2006 that typically falls on the second Saturday in May. Vancouver is a hot spot for migrating and resident birds, located on the Pacific Flyway which is traversed by at least one billion birds per year. Vancouver supports over 250 species of birds regularly seen year to year, and has four internationally-designated Important Bird Areas that surround it.

Bird Week events are key component in raising awareness of the importance of birds to our planet's ecosystems, and in conserving and protecting migrating and native birds and habitat in Vancouver and abroad. This effort is associated with the Greenest City Action Plan Goal 6: Access to Nature, which addresses the need to incorporate nature in the urban environment, including a diversity of birdlife. Vancouver is working to promote awareness and improve management of birds and their habitats through the Vancouver Bird Advisory Committee and the creation of a Vancouver Bird Strategy.

Bird Week was organized primarily by members of the Vancouver Bird Advisory Committee composed of the following partner groups:

- Stanley Park Ecology Society
- Tourism Vancouver
- Bird Studies Canada
- Pacific Wildlife Foundation
- Nature Vancouver / BC Nature
- Vancouver Public Library
- Environment Canada - Canadian Wildlife Service
- Department of Bird Safety (the artist cooperative responsible for workshops, exhibitions at Roundhouse and Hillcrest Community Centres and promotional products)

Events and Outreach

Bird Week engaged participants through a variety of different types of events. A total of 22 events (including the David Sibley lecture) were organized for Bird Week that varied from workshops, talks, walks, lectures, and art exhibitions (refer to Table 1).

Table 1 - Listing of Bird Week Events held in 2014

Date	Event	Venue	Participants
4/29/2014	David Sibley Book Tour Lecture	Vancouver Public Library	130
5/3/2014	Opening Celebration Ceremony	VPB Offices	65
5/3/2014	Herons to Hummingbirds Walk	Stanley Park	40
5/3/2014	Green Club Bird Walk (Mandarin)	Queen Elizabeth Park	20
5/4/2014	Drawing for Birders Workshop	Stanley Park Ecology Society	17

5/5/2014	George Clulow Amazing Birds of Vancouver Lecture	Vancouver Public Library	250
5/6/2014	State of Birds in Burrard Inlet Lecture	Stanley Park Ecology Society	30
5/7/2014	Bird Taxidermy Workshop	Stanley Park Ecology Society	17
5/7/2014	Drawing Birds for Kids Workshop	Hillcrest Community Centre	20
5/8/2014	Raptor Identification Workshop	Stanley Park Ecology Society	52
5/8/2014	Bird Taxidermy Workshop	Stanley Park Ecology Society	300
5/7/2014	Drawing Birds for Kids Workshop	Hillcrest Community Centre	20
5/9/2014	Crow Night Lecture and Film	Vancouver Public Library	315
5/10/2014	Dick Cannings Why Birds Matter Lecture	Vancouver Public Library	180
5/10/2014	Nature Vancouver Walks (8 parks)	Various Vancouver Parks	168
Total	22 events	14 venues	1624

These events saw a total of 1624 attendees across all events with the majority attending events held in the Alice McKay Room at the Vancouver Public Library.

Organizers were provided a unique opportunity for the author David Sibley to give a pre-Bird Week lecture on April 29th as part of a book tour for his newly revised second edition of the *Sibley Guide to Birds*. Anticipated attendance for this event was predicted to be very high, so organizers used Eventbrite to track registration. Registration assisted in ensuring that the event would not be oversold, however, organizers later found that it is against VPL policy to pre-register events. Eventbrite was also used in registering visitors for other SPES events including Drawing for Birders, State of Marine Birds, and Raptor Identification, which proved useful in being able to confirm room capacity and track numbers as well as for contacting attendees for feedback following events. There was some difficulty using the Eventbrite system as organizers learned that only half of registrants actually attended events, while some attendees did not realize there was registration available. This is likely due to the fact that event registration did not have a cost, and therefore not attending was not penalized. Virtually every event was well attended, and was either near capacity, at capacity or slightly over capacity, and very few participants had to be turned away from events.

City Bird Competition

Informed by research conducted by Stephane Fontaine (CityStudio Vancouver program), organizers undertook Vancouver's first ever Vancouver City Bird competition. The purpose of the City Bird competition was to raise awareness about bird species to new audiences through various media formats and to assist in the promotion of Bird Week events. Competitions like this have been used in very few locations around the world prior to Vancouver's launch in 2014, but those that had made attempts demonstrated success in engaging their publics.



Nomination Process

City Bird nominees were chosen based on interviews with local birders conducted by Stephane Fontaine and discussions with Bird Advisory Committee members. These were then further narrowed down by Bird Week organizers to only include resident bird species of the Lower Mainland (i.e. species that do not migrate to other regions for the winter or to breed). It was decided that, due to the popularity of Bird Week 2013's 'Society of Crows' talk by Dr. Rob Butler, the Northwestern Crow would serve as honorary City Bird for 2014 for promotional purposes. The six species nominated for City Bird 2015 were:

- Anna's Hummingbird
- Pileated Woodpecker
- Northern Flicker
- Varied Thrush
- Black-capped Chickadee
- Pacific Wren

It is intended that the City Bird competition will be conducted annually alongside Bird Week and each year nominees would be chosen by a categorical theme (e.g. water birds, raptors or migratory songbirds).

The Competition

Members of the City of Vancouver communications team managed the City Bird competition. It was decided that it would mainly be a social media campaign strictly based in Twitter. Each candidate was represented by a separate twitter account. Local bird experts and Bird Week organizers worked alongside communications staff to create personality traits and unique characteristics for each bird that would manifest via twitter personas. These characteristics and information were amalgamated into a communications plan that guided the type of engagement used.

The competition ran from April 10th to May 10th, and saw the majority of interest (in terms of page views and interactions with twitter accounts) in the first and last weeks. Votes could be

cast online at vancouver.ca/citybird through an online survey form or in-person at ballot stations in various locations across Vancouver including:

- Hillcrest Community Centre
- Roundhouse Community Centre
- Stanley Park Nature House on Lost Lagoon
- Vancouver Park Board Office at 2099 Beach Avenue
- Vancouver Public Library Central Branch
- Wild Birds Unlimited (West Broadway)

Goals of the Social Media Campaign

The goals of the social media campaign were to:

- Drive at least 2,000 votes in the poll;
- Have 30% of those surveyed hear about the competition through social media; and
- Drive large awareness of City Bird through numerous mentions of the #vancitybird hashtag, high retweets and mentions for each bird account, high clicks to account links, and high visits to the City Bird page.

The Results

Over 704,000 votes were cast online (compared to the last municipal election with less than 150,000 votes) which exceeded the anticipated goal by over 35,000%. Online votes were traceable to approximately 25,000 pageviews made by 11,430 individual unique IP addresses. Almost 1,500 votes were cast in person at ballot stations.

Vote for your favorite Vancouver City Bird
Mark your choice by checking one of the circle.

	1 Anna's Hummingbird <i>Calypte anna</i> @annathebird	<input type="radio"/>
	2 Black-capped Chickadee <i>Poecile atricapillus</i> @vancityblackcap	<input type="radio"/>
	3 Varied Thrush <i>Ixoreus naevius</i> @thevariedthrush	<input type="radio"/>
	4 Pacific Wren <i>Troglodytes pacificus</i> @pacificwren	<input type="radio"/>
	5 Pileated Woodpecker <i>Dryocopus pileatus</i> @vanwoodpecker	<input type="radio"/>
	6 Northern Flicker <i>Colaptes auratus</i> @northernflick	<input type="radio"/>

Enter for a chance to win a signed copy of David Sibley's revised Guide to Birds.

Check here if you would like to stay informed about Vancouver Bird Week.

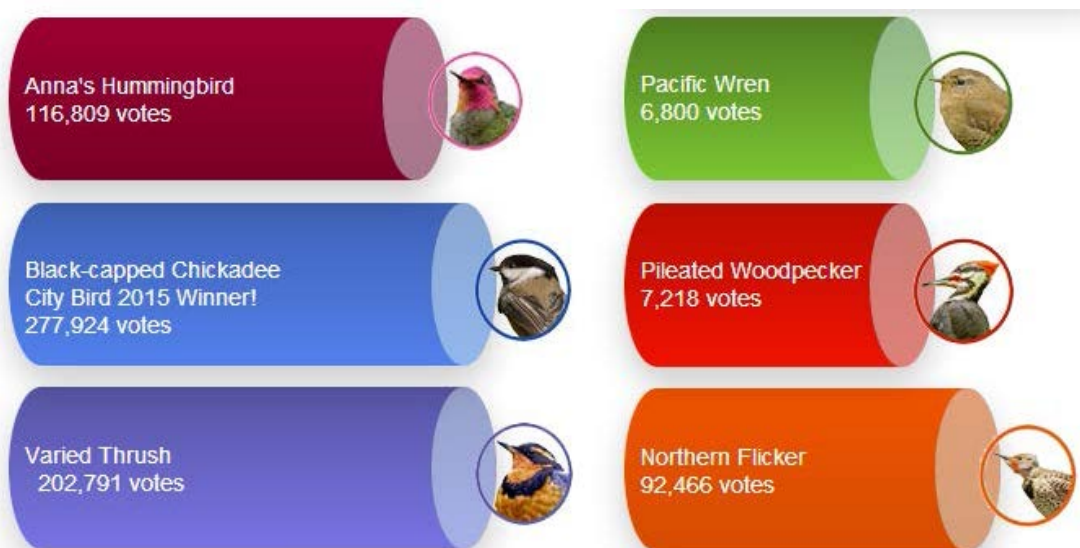
name _____
phone _____
email _____

Figure 1 - City Bird ballot in-person ballots and online survey form

The final tally for votes cast in-person was as follows:

Bird	Total Votes
Black-capped Chickadee	442
Anna's Hummingbird	379
Northern Flicker	211
Pileated Woodpecker	165
Pacific Wren	145
Varied Thrush	142

The final vote tally for votes cast online was as follows:



While there was discrepancy in the volume of votes cast online and in-person, the Black-capped Chickadee remained the most popular candidate for both methods. It won the title of City Bird 2015 with over 278,000 votes which was announced at the final Bird Week event on May 10th at the Vancouver Public Library by City Councilor Andrea Reimer and Park Board Commissioner Constance Barnes.

Promotion and Media

A wide variety of promotional avenues resulted in appearances of Bird Week in many publications and a full eight-minute live spot on Breakfast Television over four segments. A majority of respondents to our feedback survey learned about events through a wide variety of sources, however, no respondents discovered events through the City of Vancouver website (Figure 2). News media and promotion through Nature Organizations were the most influential.

Bird Week events were promoted through a variety of sources. This included promotion through:

- Publication in nature organization’s newsletters
- Posters and postcards distributed to Community Centres and nature organizations
- Media releases
- Online at City of Vancouver Calendar of Events and website
- Through City Bird competition and on Twitter via @VancouverBirds account
- Eventbrite for a limited subset of events

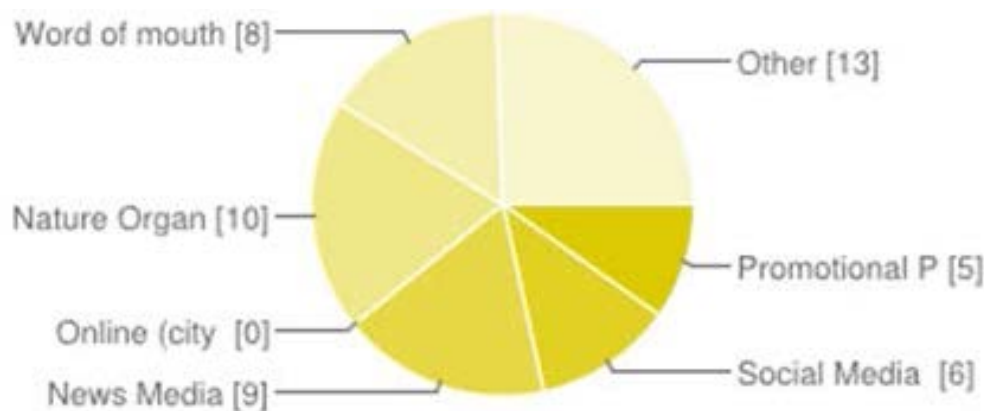


Figure 2 - Sources through which respondents learned about Bird Week events

The City Bird competition received a large amount of media attention from a wide variety of media outlets in both print and TV, and included a four-minute monologue dedicated by Jian Gimeshi of CBC’s Q radio show. Despite the huge success of the City Bird competition, and the media attention it drew, it did not appear to result in a large amount of attendees at Bird Week events (12%).

Specific to the City Bird campaign, an exit poll showed 73% found out about the campaign from someone they follow on Twitter. There were 3914 mentions of #VanCityBird with the highest frequency of tweets at the start and end of the campaign. The majority of tweets were retweets. It was comparable to Healthy City coverage, but with no partners or paid posts and reached more accounts.

There were 11,430 unique visitors to the City Bird site. Most visits to the site were from BC (65%) but many were from farther away, including, near the top of the list, Calgary, Toronto, Amsterdam and Ottawa.

There were 43 total articles on the competition in four weeks: 3 radio spots, 3 television, 18 blog posts and 19 print articles.

Survey of Bird Week Attendees by Stanley Park Ecology Society

Following Bird Week, a brief online survey hosted by the Stanley Park Ecology Society through Google Docs was used to gather feedback from attendees. This survey was broadcast primarily to attendees that had either left information on a sign-in sheet taken to events, or those that had registered for events using Eventbrite, so attendees of the larger Vancouver Public

Library events are likely under-represented in this sample. Overall 51 feedback forms were received.

Some primary findings of the survey showed that the majority considered themselves to be intermediate birders, a large percentage were beginners, while very few considered themselves to be expert or non-birders (Figure 3).

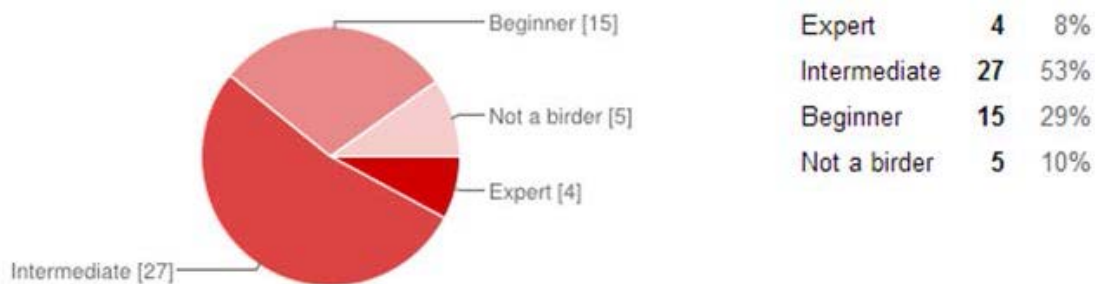


Figure 3 - Level of birding ability of surveyed respondents at Bird Week events

In an attempt to understand how Bird Week affected attendees' awareness of and knowledge about birds as a result of attending events, was recorded on a scale from 1 - 5. A high percentage chose either 4 or 5 for both categories demonstrating that the events they attended had a positive impact on feelings of knowledge and awareness of birds.

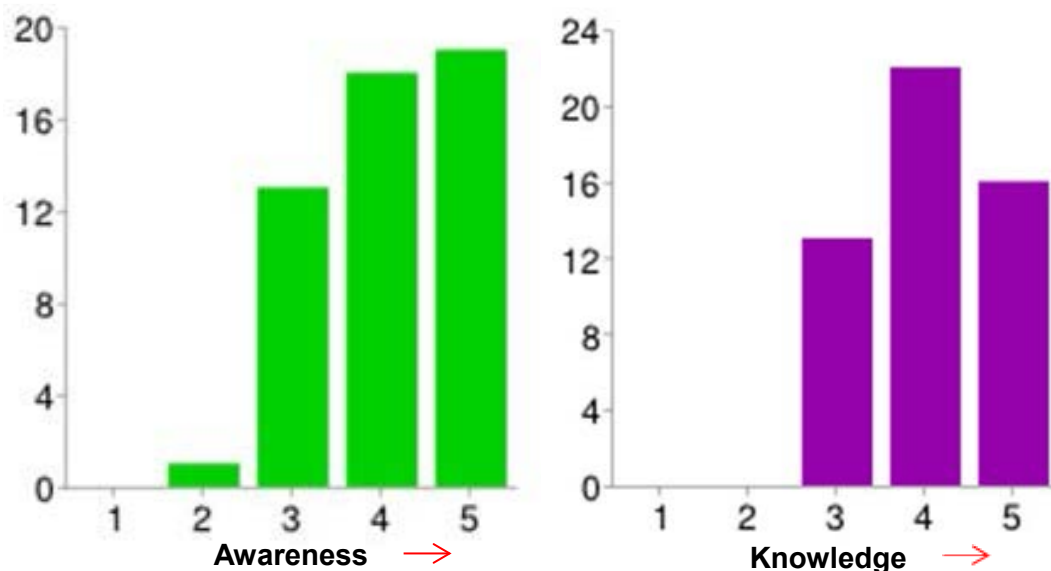


Figure 4 - Respondents feelings about how much more aware of birds they are in their environment (left) and how much more knowledgeable (right) they feel about birds following Bird Week events on a scale from 1 - 5, where 1 is less knowledgeable/aware and 5 is more knowledgeable/aware

Overall, feedback was almost entirely positive. One respondent commented, "These events heightened my awareness of the diversity of birds found in an urban setting". Other comments that reflected positive feedback were as follows:

- *I loved the tables of info-- esp. the one with all the real wings.*

- *Loved the calibre of the speakers - can't wait for next year's!*
- *Coming across the hummingbird banding was the highlight of my trip to Vancouver—in particular, getting to hold a hummingbird in my hand!*
- *Excellent job promoting birds and nature!*
- *Bird Week is a great idea. I look forward to next year and want to attend more events.*

Survey of City Bird Campaign Participants by Corporate Communications

A survey administered from TalkVancouver through an anonymous link was intended to determine how effective the campaign was. 88% could identify the six birds in the competition (they picked out that the Townsend's Warbler was not one of the contestants). A clear majority (35%) said that the winning bird was their favourite which is consistent with the results. Also interesting was that of the respondents:

- 75% said they knew more about birds after the City Bird campaign;
- 71% thought about birds more often;
- 55% said they notice birds more in Vancouver after the competition;
- 18% attended a Bird Week event as a result of the competition; and
- 73% said Twitter was the biggest referrer for the campaign.

Results from the survey and verbatims were basically all positive. The following are representative examples:

- *A really great initiative from the City. More interactive bird stuff on the website would be great. Like audio or video, maybe a bird-calling competition. And most importantly, Team Wren should've won. We were robbed. Looking forward to next year's comp.*
- *Aside from the incredibly suspicious voting activity (voting bots?), this was a great campaign. I'm sure it has exceeded your own expectations, but I was surprised to find people mentioning it to me in general conversation. Good job!*
- *I loved the twitter accounts of the birds, their reactions to things like being mentioned on CBC, and their promotion of the human election. Do it again next year! There are birds who were missed - House Sparrow? European Starling?*
- *I think it's a great initiative! I didn't see much promotion for the events, though, so I didn't get to any. I'd love for the city to follow-up by encouraging people to create habitat for birds in the city. Perhaps you could focus on having people do one thing to help the Black-capped Chickadee this summer?*
- *I would have liked to see more ecology and natural history information coming from the birds. Most of the banter was jokes, or didn't seem related to that bird's natural history/ecology, so not that informative. I asked a question of all the "candidates" on twitter and never heard back, that was a little disappointing. But overall I thought this was great! Good idea and kudos to the humans behind the twitter accounts.*
- *Loved this competition. Great way to promote awareness. I will miss Anna's Hummingbird tweets, although I now have a pair tweeting at a feeder I installed two weeks ago! :)*
- *Thank you soooo much for doing this, absolutely loved it. Even though I only made it to 1 event I did become very interested in bird watching and in fact will be taking VSB bird watching course!*

- *Great idea! I'm already an avid bird enthusiast, and it was great to see people's awareness raised by the campaign. Humour was a nice touch, rather than dry knowledge, to pull in normally uninterested public.*
- *Anna forever!*

Staff Team Debrief on the Campaign

A debrief session was held with the campaign staff team to review what worked, what could be improved and what the opportunities may be for the next City Bird. The discussion revealed the following strengths, weaknesses and possible threats as well as opportunities for the campaign for City Bird 2016.

Strengths:

- Great teamwork between tweeters & birders!!
- Photos provided were helpful
- Participation of @VancouverBirds and @SPES was helpful - good content to retweet
- HUMOUR!!!

Weaknesses:

- Wanted more access to bird experts
- Voting volume was suspicious (find better option next time)
- Closing polls - want more time to set up
- Need more tweeters to help
- Need one central person to provide web content
- Wanted more collateral in advance
- Too long: reduce to three weeks
- Need more graphics support

Threats:

- Lots of other campaigns at same time (Capital Plan, Emergency Prep Week) - maybe birds could endorse a campaign?

Opportunities for Next Year:

- Pair each tweeter with a bird expert next time
- Bird Strategy content for 2015
- Bird experts to do advance training (field trips?)
- More digital interactive stuff (bird calls, ring tones)
- "Ask a Birder" twitter chat
- Get the community more involved (graphics? badges? buttons & shirts?)
- More bird swag at events
- Get influencers to advocate
- SPES and Parks to adopt winning account
- Sponsorship/partnership with orgs
- Open nomination process up publicly - gains more attention
- Link more strongly to Bird Week
- Link to Civics 101 lessons (infographics)

- Emphasize that primary objective is awareness
- More concerted events targeted around the candidate birds

Recommendations for Bird Week 2015

When asked what types of events people would like to see in future years, respondents requested more walks, followed by more presentations, workshops and citizen science activities (Figure 5).

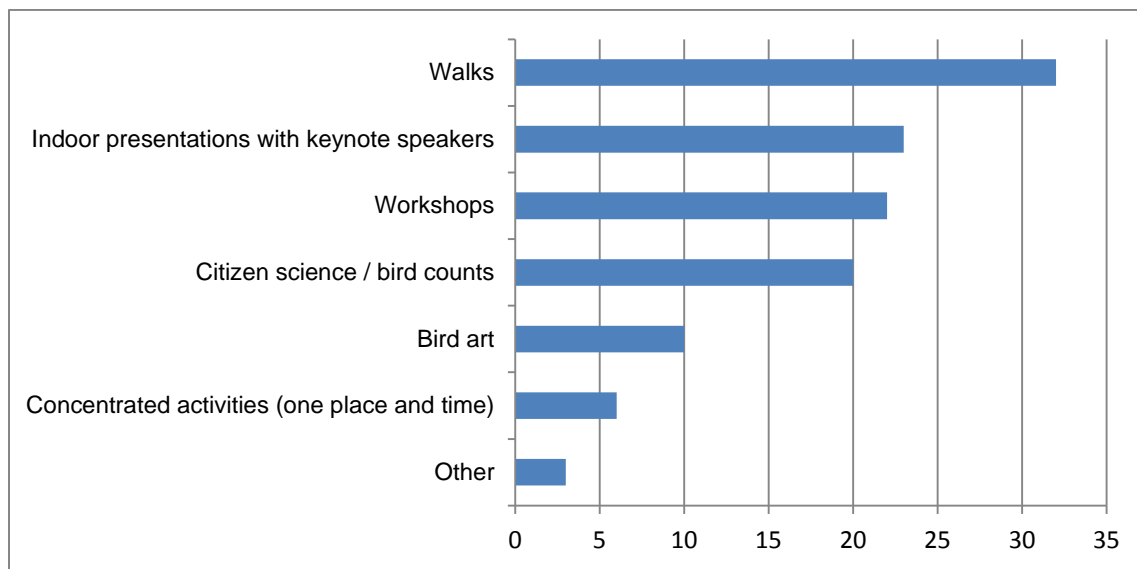


Figure 5 - Requested event activities for future Bird Weeks by survey respondents

The following are a few suggestions made by survey respondents for next year:

- *Have a citizen contributory events like getting people to print out photos of birds, photographed in Vancouver, and bring them to events, and then put them up on a big wall at the VPL*
- *Every event I went to was full or over full. Please use larger venues, or run events twice*
- *Bring Pete Dunne or Ken Kaufman next year*
- *I would be happy to give a few dollars at the door if the funds would be used to create more programming*
- *Put the idea out to the schools in Vancouver both elementary and secondary*
- *How about something that combines cycling and birding?*
- *How about a guide to great Vancouver birding spots you can get to by bike or transit such as Stanley Park, Jericho Park and Queen Elizabeth Park? In the birding world it's called non-motorized transport (or NMT) birding*

Based on the list of suggestions and survey results, it would be beneficial to provide more opportunities to allow the public to contribute their art and/or knowledge via citizen science and photography/art workshops and exhibitions.

The only real criticisms of Bird Week had to do with the venues. With more active promotion and more space organizers in future years may be able to use larger venues. A few respondents also commented that the Stanley Park Ecology Society venue was hard to find, and too far out of the way. Organizers of future events may do well to distribute events further afield around the city, utilizing a wider diversity of community centres and centrally based school campuses.

Finally, from an administrative perspective, the series of events was challenging to execute with the level of funding provided. If significant additions are to be made to future Bird Week events, supplementary funding sources including grants and sponsorships, will be required.

Recommendations for City Bird 2016

While the City Bird competition was very well-received, and exceeded expectations in every respect, the most common concern raised either in personal communications or via the two surveys was that the competition felt rigged due to some of the enormous surges in numbers of votes experienced with the online voting, and that future voting should be better controlled. In addition, the staff debrief identified opportunities to make the campaign for the next City Bird even better in 2015 (refer to Staff Team Debrief on the Campaign).

Conclusion

By all measures, Vancouver Bird Week 2014 was a success in achieving the goal of raising awareness about birds in Vancouver. The City Bird for 2015 campaign in particular vastly exceeded targets for voting, awareness and education. Reaction to the competition was intensely positive; people loved it and wanted more. Media coverage was very high and exceeded that of larger projects at City, with no paid element. People put forward many ideas for improvement and expansion for next year and are clearly looking forward to the next campaign.