

The Status and Occurrence of the Brambling (*Fringilla montifringilla*) in British Columbia.
By Rick Toochin and Don Cecile.

Introduction and Distribution

The Brambling (*Fringilla montifringilla*) is a beautiful Old World finch that is found breeding throughout the northern open coniferous and woodland forests from Scandinavia through Russia to the Russian Far East across the Yakutia, Chukotka, south through Koryakia, Kamchatka, the Sea of Okhotsk, south to Amurland and Sakhalin Island (Brazil 2009, Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). Bramblings are a highly migratory species that migrate in the spring in April and in the fall in October (Jonsson 1992, Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). Bramblings have a vast winter range from southern Europe, to North Africa, to northern India, into northern Pakistan, throughout China and Japan (Beadle and Rising 2006). The Brambling is a rare species in the winter in Taiwan (Beadle and Rising 2006).

In Europe Bramblings form large flocks in the winter that can sometimes number in the thousands or even millions of birds in a single flock (Jonsson 1992, Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). Such large gatherings occur, especially if beech mast is abundant (Jonsson 1992, Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). Bramblings do not require beech mast in the winter, but winter flocks of Bramblings will move until they find it as this is a favourite food (Jonsson 1992, Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). This may be an adaptation to avoid competition with the similar Chaffinch (*Fringilla coelebs*) in Europe (Jonsson 1992, Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). Bramblings mostly eat seeds, but unlike most finches, their young are fed largely on insects (Jonsson 1992, Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009).

In North America, the Brambling is an uncommon to rare regular occurring species in the spring, and rarer in the fall in the western and central Aleutian Islands, the Pribilof Islands and St. Lawrence Island in Alaska (Roberson 1980, West 2008). They have bred once on Attu Island in the Aleutian Islands of Alaska in 1996 (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). Bramblings are considered a casually occurring species in the rest of Alaska with a few records of birds wintering in south coastal and southeastern Alaska in places like Kodiak, Homer and Eagle River (West 2008). In British Columbia, the Brambling is a rare but regular winter visitor with almost ninety Provincial records (Toochin *et al.* 2013, Please see Table 1). The vast majority of the observations come from the Queen Charlotte Islands (Toochin *et al.* 2013, Please see Table 1). Further south along the west coast records become scarcer. In Washington there are only fourteen accepted records by the Washington Bird Records Committee (Wahl *et al.* 2005, WBRC 2012). In Oregon there are only thirteen accepted records by the Oregon Bird Records Committee (OFO 2012). In California there are only five accepted records by the California Bird Records Committee (Hamilton *et al.* 2007). In the rest of North America, Bramblings have occurred in almost all of

the Canadian Provinces, the Yukon and from many of the northern states in the United States (Godfrey 1986, Sibley 2000, Beadle and Rising 2006).

Identification and Similar Species

The identification of all plumages of Brambling is fairly straight-forward as this species is covered in all standard North American field guides. Breeding plumage is acquired by feather wear, and occurs in the months of March and April (Beadle and Rising 2006, Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). In breeding plumage the adult male has a black head, face, bill and back (Jonsson 1992, Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). The throat, breast and shoulder in the wing are orange in colour (Sibley 2000, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The wings are black with two white wing bars and light edges to the primaries and brown edges to the tertial feathers (Jonsson 1992, Sibley 2000). On the underside of the wings, Bramblings have white axillaries with dark secondaries and primary feathers (Sibley 2000). The lower belly is white which extends to the undertail coverts (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). Along the flanks is an orange wash with large black spots (Jonsson 1992). The legs are a fleshy pale colour (Jonsson 1992). An important field mark is the white rump bordered by dark uppertail coverts (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). The upper side of the tail is dark with the underside of the tail mostly white (Sibley 2000, Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). The tail is fairly short in length and notched at the tip (Brazil 2009). In winter plumage, the adult male's bill turns yellow with a black tip (Larsson 1992). The forehead, crown, and sides of the nape are grayish buff with the center of the nape a grayish buff colour (Beadle and Rising 2006). The back, mantle and scapulars are coloured similar to the head, but have more black edges visible (Beadle and Rising 2006). The females in breeding and winter plumage have a gray-brown head with black on the forehead and the nape (Jonsson 1992, Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). The back and mantle are mottled brown with some black edges to the feathers (Beadle and Rising 2006). The shoulder is orange and there are two wing bars (Jonsson 1992). The upper wing bar is white and the lower wing bar is orange (Jonsson 1992, Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). The rest of the wing is brownish-black-coloured with light brownish edges to the tertials and light edges to the secondaries and primary feathers (Jonsson 1992, Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). The bill is mostly dark at the tip with a pale yellowish base (Jonsson 1992, Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). The throat and chest are orange with the orange extending down the flanks where there are also dark spots (Jonsson 1992, Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). The belly is white extending to the undertail coverts (Jonsson 1992, Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). The legs and feet are a fleshy pinkish colour (Jonsson 1992). The tail is the same as the male (Jonsson 1992, Brazil 2009). The rump is also white-bordered with dark uppertail covert feathers (Jonsson 1992, Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). First winter birds are similar to adult females, but duller with pale center to their crown (Beadle and Rising 2006). The flight call is a nasal "*check-check-check*", but can also be a nasal "*zwee*" call note as well (Dunn and Alderfer 2011).

Occurrence and Documentation

The Brambling has been reported from all over British Columbia from the coastal regions to the interior parts of the Province. Out of the eighty-four records that have been recorded for the Province, twenty-seven records have been found in the Queen Charlotte Islands (Toochin *et al.* 2013, Please see Table 1). This is the highest total of any one single area for the entire Province. Bramblings have been found at almost every month of the year in the Queen Charlotte Islands, including a flock of three birds that stayed in the town of Masset from November 3, 1993, to July 30, 1993 (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.) This makes the Brambling a rare but regular species only in the Queen Charlotte Islands which is an anomaly in the rest of Canada (Godfrey 1986, Toochin *et al.* 2013, Please see Table 1). The pattern of vagrancy shown by the Brambling in British Columbia follows the timing of migration in Europe and Asia which has birds moving in the months of late March through April and October through November (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). Almost all the records of Brambling in British Columbia occur between the dates October 4, and April 21, with the highest numbers occurring in the months of November and December (Toochin *et al.* 2013, Please see Table 1). There are two records from the month of September: one from Valemout in the interior and the other from the Big Qualicum River Hatchery on Vancouver Island (Toochin *et al.* 2013, Please see Table 1). There is also, from Masset, in the Queen Charlotte Islands, one May-July record (Toochin *et al.* 2013, Please see Table 1). All of these dates are very unusual and are outside the established time frame shown by all the late fall and winter records for British Columbia (Toochin *et al.* 2013, Please see Table 1). It is interesting to note that there are twenty-three interior records for the Province: five having occurred in Vernon and four having occurred in Revelstoke over many different years (Toochin *et al.* 2013, Please see Table 1). Bramblings have been found all over Vancouver Island with eighteen records (Toochin *et al.* 2013, Please see Table 1). The Vancouver area has had thirteen records from all over the region, as well as one record from the Fraser Valley (Toochin *et al.* 2013, Please see Table 1). Bramblings are most often found coming to bird feeders either in the company of Dark-eyed Juncos (*Junco hyemalis*) or on their own (Beadle and Rising 2006). The records of Bramblings also follow a pattern of eruptive years where the species is found in many different locations across British Columbia during the same winter period. The winters in the past when this has happened are 1983-1984, 1990-1991, 1998-1999 and 2005-2006, the winter of 2012-2013 being the most recent big invasion (Toochin *et al.* 2013, Please see Table 1). Often during these big eruptive years, Bramblings are also seen down the west coast from Washington to Oregon with birds sometimes found in California (Wahl *et al.* 2005, Hamilton *et al.* 2007, OFO 2012, WBRC 2012). The Brambling is a species that is possible anywhere in British Columbia in the winter period and should be watched for by both serious observers and feeder watchers across the Province. With the increased frequency of reported sightings of Brambling throughout British Columbia, there is a good chance that anyone could see this beautiful finch at their bird feeders in the future.



Figures 1 & 2: Record #6: Brambling at 1909 Billings Rd., Sooke on November 20, 1983.
Photos © Tim Zurowski.



Figure 3: Record #27: Brambling at 4300 Block Staulo Crescent, Vancouver on January 6, 1991.
Photo © Patrick Oswald. Note insert showing the Brambling enlarged from the original photo.



Figure 4: Record #52: Brambling at Blackie Spit, White Rock, Surrey on December 14, 1998.
Photo © Evelyn Whiteside.



Figure 5: Record # 80: Brambling at 868 W. 17th Ave, Vancouver on January 8, 2013.
Photo © Greg Stuart.

Table 1: British Columbia Records of Brambling:

- 1.(1) female February 7-early March, 1971: John & Jennifer Davies (BC Photo 219) Tlell, Queen Charlotte Islands (Campbell 1974, Roberson 1980)
- 2.(1) adult male November 7-9, 1971: Jack Husted, mobs (BC Photo 192) Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary, Ladner (Campbell *et al.* 1972, Campbell 1974)
- 3.(1) female February 5, 1972: Francois & Dorothy Richardson, Linda Carter: Tlell, Queen Charlotte Islands (Campbell 1974, Roberson 1980)
- 4.(1) winter plumage November 9, 1972: Rob Cannings (photo) Tlell, Queen Charlotte Islands (R.A. Cannings 1975)
- 5.(1) winter plumage November 8, 1981: , Ross & Elaine MacDonald (specimen) Cape St. James, Queen Charlotte Islands (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.)
- 6.(2) adult male & female November 20, 1983-Jan 22, 1984: Mary Morris, mobs: Queen Charlotte City, Queen Charlotte Islands (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.)
- 7.(1) winter plumage November 20, 1983: Keith Taylor, mobs (BC Photo 909) 1909 Billings Rd., Sooke (Campbell 1984, Campbell *et al.* 2001)
- 8.(1) winter plumage December 4-6, 1983: *fide Rick Howie*: Kamloops (Rogers 1984a, Campbell *et al.* 2001)
- 9.(1) adult female January 19-February 25, 1984: Jack Husted, mobs : 2540 W. 45th Ave., Vancouver (Mattocks 1984, Toochin 2012a)
- 10.(1) adult female January 21-28, 1984: Craig Runyan, mobs: Central Ave., Ladner (Mattocks 1984, Toochin 2012a)
- 11.(1) winter plumage February 8, 1984: Campbell River (Campbell 1984, Campbell *et al.* 2001)
- 12.(1) adult male February 12, 1984: Mike Price: 3672 W. 1st Ave, Vancouver (Toochin 2012a)
- 13.(1) winter plumage March 1, 1984: (BC Photo 903) Tofino (Campbell *et al.* 2001)
- 14.(1) winter plumage March 22-25, 1984: Rory Patterson, and other observers (photo) Chesterman's Beach (Campbell *et al.* 2001)
- 15.(1) winter plumage October 29-November 4, 1984: Langdale, Sunshine Coast (Hunn and Mattocks 1985, Campbell *et al.* 2001)
- 16.(1) winter plumage November 28, 1985: Parksville (Campbell *et al.* 2001)
- 17.(1) winter plumage December 19, 1985: Parksville (Campbell *et al.* 2001)
- 18.(1) winter plumage December 26, 1985-January 10, 1986: Phil Ranson, mobs (BC Photo 1101) Scotch Creek, Shuswap (Rogers 1986, Campbell *et al.* 2001)
- 19.(1) adult April 3, 1986: Mary Morris: Sandspit, QCI (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.)
- 20.(1) winter plumage March 7-30, 1987: Sandi Rathbone (BC Photo 1188) Scotch Creek, Chase (Rogers 1987, Campbell *et al.* 2001)
- 21.(1) February 2 & 12, 1989: *fide Phil Ranson* (photo) Vernon (Rogers 1989)
- 22.(1) adult male November 5, 1989-March 5, 1990: Mary Morris, Margo Hearne, Peter Hamel (specimen: killed by cat) Queen Charlotte City, QCI (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.)
- 23.(2) adults December 27, 1989- late March 1990: Doug Powell: Revelstoke (Siddle 1990)
- 24.(1) adult male December 10-11, 1990: Rick Toochin, Shirley Dorsey : Sea Island, Cora Brown Subdivision, Richmond (Toochin 2012a)
- 25.(1) winter plumage December 12, 1990-February 10, 1991: J. & B. Holt, and other observers: (photo) North Saanich (Siddle 1991, Campbell *et al.* 2001)

- 26.(1) winter plumage December 15, 1990 –February 26, 1991: B. Irwin, and other observers: Colwood (Siddle 1991, Campbell *et al.* 2001)
- 27.(1) adult female January 6, 1991: Patrick Oswald, Hilary Oswald (photo) 4300 Block Staulo Crescent, Vancouver (Dorsey 1996a, Toochin 2012a)
- 28.(1) unknown age January 23-26, 1991: Mr. and Mrs. J.A. Delter, and other observers: Hamsterley Road, Sannich, Victoria (Campbell 1991, Siddle 1991)
- 29.(1) winter plumage October 17, 1991: Margo Hearne, Peter Hamel, mobs: Delkatla Wildlife Sanctuary, Masset, Queen Charlotte Islands (Siddle 1992)
- 30.(1) winter plumage October 25-November 6, 1991: Wineglass Ranch, Chilcotin River (Riske Creek) (Campbell *et al.* 2001)
- 31.(1) female November 23-26, 1991: Revelstoke (Siddle 1992, Campbell *et al.* 2001)
- 32.(1) female December 12, 1991– February 18, 1992: Linda van Damme (dead: window strike) Nelson (Siddle 1992)
- 33.(1) adult female December 31, 1991-February 4, 1992: Mary Taitt, mobs (photo) Alaskan Wildlife Refuge, Ladner (Siddle 1992, Dorsey 1996b, Toochin 2012a)
- 34.(5) various ages March 10, 1992: Mike Bentley, Margo Hearne: Sandspit, Queen Charlotte Islands (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.)
- (1) adult March 16, 1992: Mike Bentley, Margo Hearne: Sandspit, Queen Charlotte Islands (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.)
- 35.(1) adult April 10-22, 1992: Kitimat (Campbell *et al.* 2001)
- 36.(1) winter plumage December 14, 1992: near Alkali Lake, Cariboo (Campbell *et al.* 2001)
- 37.(3) adults November 3, 1993-July 30, 1993: Pat & Phil Parish, Margo Hearne, Peter Hamel, mobs: Masset, Queen Charlotte Islands (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.)
- 38.(1) fall plumage September 4, 1994: Judy Warne: Valemount (Bowling 1995, Davidson 1995)
- 39.(1) winter plumage November 20, 1995: Peter Hamel: Delkatla Wildlife Sanctuary, Masset, Queen Charlotte Islands (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.)
- 40.(1) winter plumage December 16, 1995: E. Nygran, Neil Dawes: Little Qualicum River, Parksville (Bain and Holder 1995, Toochin *et al.* 2013b)
- 41.(1) male December 17, 1995: Doug Powell (photo) Revelstoke (Bain and Holder 1995, Bowling 1996, Toochin *et al.* 2013a)
- 42.(1) adult male December 10, 1996-April 6, 1997: Oakley, Dyer, Betsy Williams, Margo Hearne, Peter Hamel: Masset, Queen Charlotte Islands (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.)
- 42.(1) female January 3-16, 1998: V. Geist, Don Cecile, mobs: 10 km west of Port Alberni (O'Shaughnessy 1998, Bowling 1998, Toochin *et al.* 2013b)
- 43.(1) winter plumage October 28-November 1, 1998: Rory Patterson, mobs (photo) Tofino (Shepard 1999, Toochin *et al.* 2013b)
- 44.(1) adult October 29-November 3, 1998: JW, AR, mobs : Williams Lake (Shepard 1999, Toochin *et al.* 2013a)
- (1) adult November 3, 1998: JW, AR, mobs: Williams Lake (Shepard 1999, Toochin *et al.* 2013a)
- 45.(1) adult November 1, 1998: *fide Robin Weber*: Ridley Island (second bird joined bird above) (Shepard 1999, Toochin *et al.* 2013a)

- 46.(1) adult November 1, 1998: Margo Hearne & Peter Hamel: Entry Point, Queen Charlotte Islands (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.)
- 47.(1) winter plumage November 12, 1998: Myers Lake, south of Rock Creek (Campbell *et al.* 2001)
- 48.(1) adult November 24-26, 1998: Bruce McVicar: Sicamous (Shepard 1999, Toochin *et al.* 2013a)
- 49.(1) adult female November 26-December 1, 1998: Pat McAllister: near Vernon, Lavington (Shepard 1999, Toochin *et al.* 2013a)
- 50.(1) adult female December 1, 1998 -April 5, 1999: Heather Asplin, mobs: Campbell River (Shepard 1999, Toochin *et al.* 2013a)
- 51.(1) winter plumage December 3-28, 1998: Mark Phinne, mobs: Prince George (Shepard 1999, Campbell *et al.* 2001)
- 52.(1) adult male December 6, 1998-January 16, 1999: Mary Peet-Leslie, mobs (photo) Blackie Spit, White Rock, Surrey (Shepard 1999, Toochin 2012a)
- 53.(1) adult male December 9, 1998-April 10, 1999: Adelia & Bryan Lowrie, Margo Hearne, Peter Hamel: Port Clements, Queen Charlotte Islands (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.) [Possibly the same bird as November 1 at Entry Pt.]
- 54.(1) adult December 20, 1998: Phil Jones: outside of Vernon, Lavington (different to earlier bird) (Shepard 1999, Toochin *et al.* 2013a)
- 55.(1) adult male December 26, 1998: Joyce Sinclair, mobs: Head of the Lake, Vernon (Shepard 1999, Toochin *et al.* 2013a)
- 56.(1) adult male January 30-February 15, 2000: N. Spicer, mobs (photo) Burns Lake (Bain and Shannon 2000, Toochin *et al.* 2013a)
- 57.(1) adult male January 20-April 14, 2001: Quentin Brown, mobs (photo) 1961 Berkley Ave., North Vancouver (Cecile 2001a, Cecile 2001b, Toochin 2012a)
- 58.(1) adult male breeding plumage April 7, 2001: Rick Toochin, Jason Osterhold, Mitch Meredith : outside Kilby Provincial Park, near Harrison Mills (Toochin 2012c)
- 59.(1) adult male November 20, 2003: Roger Burrows : 4140 Golf Drive, North Vancouver (Cecile 2004, Toochin 2012a)
- 60.(1) female December 12, 2003-April 2, 2004: Janet & Michael Brown, Margo Hearne, Peter Hamel: Tlell, Queen Charlotte Islands (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.)
- 61.(1) fall plumage September 19, 2005: Will Lemon: Norne Lake Road, near Big Qualicum River Hatchery (Toochin *et al.* 2013b)
- 62.(1) winter plumage November 8, 2005: Adelia & Bryan Lowrie, Margo Hearne, Peter Hamel: Port Clements, Queen Charlotte Islands (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.)
- (2) winter plumage November 12, 2005: Adelia & Bryan Lowrie, Margo Hearne, Peter Hamel: Port Clements, Queen Charlotte Islands (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.)
- (3) winter plumage November 18, 2005-December 31, 2005: Adelia & Bryan Lowrie, Margo Hearne, Peter Hamel (photo) Port Clements, Queen Charlotte Islands (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.)
- 63.(1) winter plumage November 18, 2005: Al Grosvenor: Sandspit, Queen Charlotte Islands (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.)
- 64.(1) winter plumage December 3, 2005: Lorrie Joron (photo) 2043 Teal St., Masset, Queen Charlotte Islands (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.)

- 65.(1) winter plumage January 28-March 18, 2006: Georgia Darbyshire, mobs (photo) Duncan (Cecile 2006a, Cecile 2006b, Toochin *et al.* 2013b)
- 66.(1) adult male March 16-18, 2006: Martin & Daphne Williams, Peter Hamel: 385 Eagle St., Masset, Queen Charlotte Islands (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.)
- 67.(1) adult late January-March 16, 2008: mobs (photo) Prince Creek (Cecile 2008)
- 68.(1) adult male March 10-16, 2008: Ruth Foster, mobs (photo) 3712 Bedwell Bay Road, Belcarra (Toochin 2012a)
- 69.(1) winter plumage April 13-20, 2008: Brian Slater, mobs (photo) Ucluelet (Cecile 2008a)
- 70.(2) male & female April 21, 2008: Peter Hamel (photos) Willows Golf Course, Sandspit, Queen Charlotte Islands (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.)
- 71.(1) adult male October 4-5, 2010: Stewart and Jess Marshall (photo) West Vancouver (Toochin 2012a)
- 72.(1) adult November 7, 2010: Russell Cannings, Jukka Jantunen, Cameron Eckert, Jess Findlay: Tlell, Queen Charlotte Islands (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.)
- 73.(1) female December 31, 2011-January 5, 2012: Ray Lapshinoff, mobs (photo) Magnum Place, Saanich (Toochin *et al.* 2013b)
- 74.(2) winter plumage October 19, 2012: Ray Woods, Phil Cam, Mike Mulligan, Brian Elder (photo) Sandspit Airfield, Queen Charlotte Islands (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.)
- 75.(1) winter plumage October 21-22, 2012: Adelia & Bryan Lowrie, Martin Williams, Peter Hamel (photo) Port Clements, Queen Charlotte Islands (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.)
- 76.(1) winter plumage November 14-19, 2012: Peter Hamel, Margo Hearne (photo) Sandspit Airport, Queen Charlotte Islands (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.)
- 77.(1) winter plumage November 26-30, 2012: Al Ward: 1667 Delkatla, Masset, Queen Charlotte Islands (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.)
- (1) winter plumage December 1-2, 2012: M. Wins: 1696 Hodges St., Masset, Queen Charlotte Islands (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.) [Possibly the same bird as above]
- 78.(1) adult male December 16, 2012- January 10, 2013: Tom Lowery, Robin de Young, mobs (photo) S5618 Nixon Road, Summerland (Toochin *et al.* 2013)
- 79.(1) adult male December 17, 2012-March 20, 2013: Darlene Cancelliere, mobs (photo) 407 Edward St., Revelstoke (Toochin *et al.* 2013)
- 80.(1) adult male December 22, 2012-April 9, 2013: Tina Hurd, mobs (photo) 868 W. 17th Ave, Vancouver (Toochin *et al.* 2013a)
- 81.(1) immature January 2-3, 2013: John & Louise Baumbrough: Old Kamloops Rd, Vernon (Toochin *et al.* 2013a)
- 82.(1) immature January 2-February 4, 2013: Peter Feichtner, mobs (photo) #84 Kelly Rd., Gibsons (Toochin *et al.* 2013a)
- 83.(1) immature January 10-March 23, 2013: Mike Shepard (photo) near Cochrane St. & Forrester St., Victoria (Toochin *et al.* 2013b)
- 84.(1) male December 26, 2013: Rick Toochin, Martin Williams: Tlell, QCI (R. Toochin Pers. Comm.)

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