

First ever Valley sighting of longbilled curlew

An eagle-eyed birdwatcher spotted a rare visitor to Vancouver Island on Saturday.

A Comox resident spotted a longbilled curlew probing the sand at Croteau Beach, looking for a meal.

"This is the first sighting ever for the Comox Valley," said Father Charles Brandt, an ornithologist from Black Creek. "One was spotted on Mitlenatch Island (near Campbell River) on April 25, 1983."

Brandt and Nathan Hentz of Cumberland both confirmed the curlew's identification; Brandt managed to photograph the curlew at Croteau Beach on Sunday.

A shorebird, the curlew stands 23 inches high and has a wingspan of 35 inches; Brandt said it was feeding in



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PHOTO BY FATHER CHARLES BRANDT

shallow water along with Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs.

"The curlew has an extremely long bill, which is used for probing in the mud and sand to discover food," he said.

Hentz stated that the bird has a small notch near the tip of the bill, the underwings are buff in color when seen in flight and the curlew

has bit of an eyering at the back of the eye.

Wayne Campbell, provincial ornithologist and author of the definitive four-volume set of Birds of British Columbia, writes that the longbilled curlew breeds from Southern Interior B.C. and winters on coastal lowlands from California south. It is a rare spring migrant on the south coast of B.C.