

THE PARKLAND NATURALIST

SUMMER 2009



A PUBLICATION OF THE
EDMONTON NATURE CLUB

<http://enc.fanweb.ca/>



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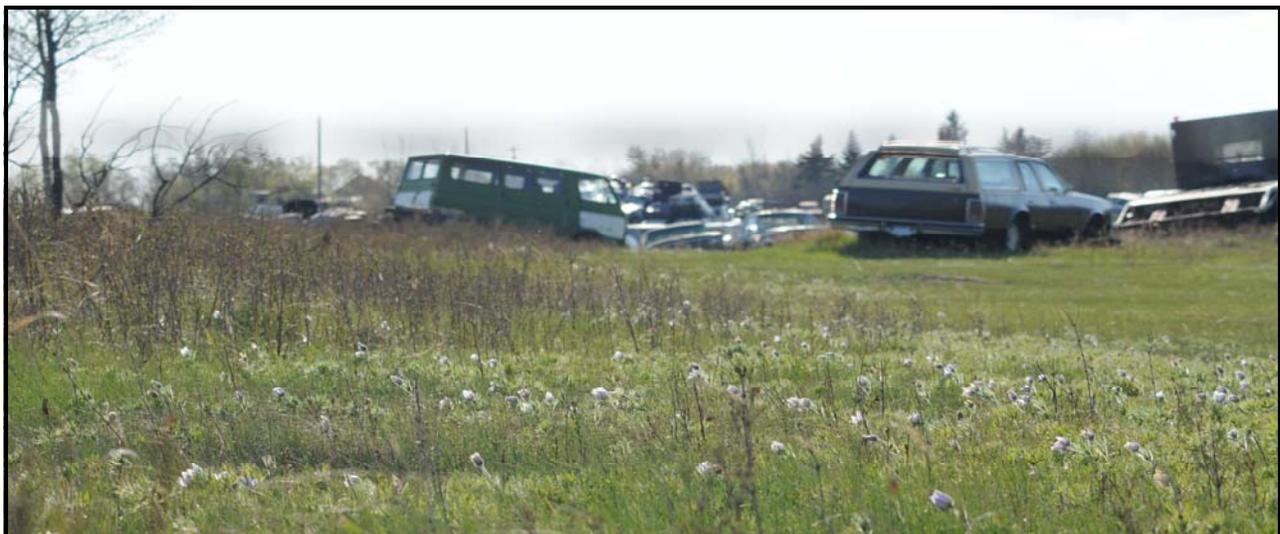
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Conservation?

The prairie crocus thrives in undisturbed sites. It is a sad commentary on the state of affairs if the only areas left for plant conservation are also treated as dumping grounds.

These photos were taken in the Tofield area this past May.

Photos and commentary by Lu Carbyn



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Applications may be downloaded from the ENC website.

Membership Rates:

Adult/family \$30/year

Senior \$20/year

Student \$20/year

Advertising rates

Quarter page	\$25/1 issue	\$80/4 issues
Half page	\$40/1 issue	\$120/4 issues
Full page	\$75/1 issue	\$200/4 issues

Submissions may be sent to:

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On the cover

A group of children from one of the Snow Goose Chase buses enjoy some raptor watching at the Francis Point blind on the south end of Beaverhills Lake.

President's Message

The executive has been working very hard on certain issues, but little gets reported in the clubs newsletters so here is a brief mention of some of the current concerns.



Photo: Steve Knight

The new website is up and running and I think all have done a great job! I am a member of a number of food and wine forums so guess I know my way around. The discussion forums are ideal

places to ask questions, post pictures or reports of a day out. I think it is imperative that we all use a real name policy when we link in as personal attacks will never be tolerated. This is becoming an issue on certain sites so lets nip it in the bud early!

Katie organized a very good banquet and the speaker was excellent. It was a thrill to see Ed Jones there as a complimentary guest of the club and he was in great demand throughout the evening. He was looking north

across to the trees opposite the Faculty Club and mentioned that " a Pileated Woodpecker had just flown by!". The recent banquet attendance has been consistently high, so it's an event not to be missed.

One item of concern is the cost of renting space at the Royal Alberta Museum. Many members might not be aware that it costs the club over \$550 to book the auditorium for one evening. That is a very high cost so it is possible we might be looking around for another facility in the future.

Another issue under discussion is a plan put out by FAN, our governing body, to start discussions on making their magazine, Nature Alberta, more accessible to members at a reduced subscription rate. There would also be some space available to clubs for possible news articles and so on.

There was an important discussion at the May meeting about a nominating committee for the upcoming AGM. We did not have a Vice-President this year and my filling in as President was only a stop-gap measure. There are over 400 members in the club so it is important that some new blood step up to take an active role in running the club. Please think about what you have to offer, the club needs some new ideas from some enthusiastic newbies!!

Bob Parsons, President ENC

Editor's Message

Sharp-eyed club members will have noticed a few changes to our club's magazine/newsletter, the name being a big one. "Nature News" was a fine name, but there was constant confusion with "Nature Network".

Choosing a new name wasn't easy. The executive spent a lot of time brain storming. Hopefully "Parkland Naturalist" will work for everyone.

"Parkland", of course, is the eco-region we live in and "Naturalist" defines what we do. The name is also an update of the Edmonton Natural History Club's publication, "Edmonton Naturalist".

Bright observers may also notice the color on the covers. Since the editor is also doing the layout work, we don't have to pay for a professional - no comments on unprofessional layout necessary! Anyway, we do have the funds to add some color to our publication.

Hopefully this will encourage some more submissions. I'd sure like to see some material on plants, bugs, & insects. Please consider sending in photos and articles of any interesting encounters or adventures you've had this summer.

Gerald Romanchuk, Editor

Councillor Linda Sloan



*Sharing your passion
for nature and working
to enhance our
City's conservation.
Call me to share your
concerns and thoughts.*

496-8122

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WEB: www.lindasloan.com

Snow Goose Chase 2009

Another successful Snow Goose Chase.

The annual Snow Goose Chase on the weekend of April 25/26 was eagerly awaited by the many participants who were booked on the seven buses run by the Edmonton Nature Club. Four buses of inner-city school children and



Brenda helps some children scope the geese.

local organizations, as well as three buses for the paying public, were all expecting to experience local nature along with the huge spring migration of ducks, swans, geese, hawks and other bird species. Jim Lange and Bob Gehlert had spent a lot of time scouting out the area to the east and north of Tofield and were certain that many snowies would be spotted. I felt sure that a second wave was due as reports from locations such as Medicine Hat informed me that many thousands of snow geese were ready to move north.

This year's Chase has to surely rank as the coldest event in its ten year history and I was surprised at the high turnout. I thought there would be some no-shows due to the wintery weather but overall we had an excellent showing by all the participants. Red-tailed Hawks on nest had been recorded by Jim and there was a Great Horned Owl on a nest just north of Tofield which could be easily seen looking through the many spotting scopes available. Parsons Quarry just north of the town was visited by all the buses and good numbers of Tundra Swans and American Pelicans were seen along with an assortment of ducks and a few shorebirds.

The usual brief visit was made to the Tofield Nature Centre and then the buses moved onto the community hall where a number of displays and exhibits were put on for the children's buses. Coffee and muffins went down really well and participants were able to study the perched hawks and owls from the Valley Zoo. Nadi, the local tame Burrowing Owl, was very popular as was the bird slide show put on by Don Delaney who is a terrific member of our nature community.

After a terrific buffet lunch put on at the Legion and an entertaining talk by Hugh Campbell on local history, everyone got back on the buses and headed east to find the snow geese. The run was expected to take about 20 minutes to the scouted-out area and along the way many saw hawks, bluebirds, Western Meadowlark, a heron or two plus some lingering Snow Buntings and Longspurs in the dried-out fields. Many wetland areas were completely dry this year and it was obvious that Ducks Unlimited were finding no water from the streams to fill their wetland projects. Usually one would expect to find a few migrating shorebirds in these wet spots but apart from some yellow-legs, nothing of note was spotted.

After some radio transmissions with the scouts, we were finally able to come across many thousands of snow geese in the area just to the east of the lake. There were also over 200 Sandhill Cranes in the area so everyone



The Royal Alberta Museum's creepy crawlers were a big hit!

Snow Goose Chase 2009 - continued

was able to get a good look. The geese were flying around quite nervously, so it was possible that a wandering hawk or eagle was stirring them up. Many who had been on previous trips thought this was the highest concentration of snow geese they had ever seen.

Many more geese and cranes were seen on the way back to Tofield, along with some migrating tundra swans.

Two of my spotters had spent the whole morning out on the east side and they figured they had seen a total of over 80 hawks in a four hour period. These were very impressive numbers for a cold and generally unpleasant day weather-wise!

Guess we do it all again next year.

Bob Parsons, Snow Goose Chase Co-ordinator



Who needs geese? Children enjoy an encounter with some cattle.

A Personal Perspective of the Chase

One of the unavoidable rites of Spring in these parts is the Snow Goose Chase, organized by our own venerable Bob Parsons. Bobbie-boy, as I like to call him, is a tireless organizer and volunteer for this event and he makes sure we Edmonton Nature Club members do our share to promote nature. We help young and old experience the treasure nature has in store for us, if we only just go out and look for it! In addition to Bob, we have of course a cast of many-dozens of faithful volunteers and sponsors that make this annual event possible, most of whom have been participating continuously for ten years and my thanks go out to them for making this event a yearly success!

My personal perspective on this event relates to serving as an on-bus guide for the adult and seniors buses that are part of the event. Over the years, I have come to think of these bus-tours as Lifer-delivery vehicles par ex-

cellence! Through the mentoring of long-time leaders Jim Lange and Peter DeMulder, we use the following routine to prepare the attendees for a day of Life-Bird spotting:

First we deliver the attendees their handouts and checklists and bottled water too. Next comes field-guides and making sure every seat has at least one. Then comes the binoculars, for which we have a generous supply provided by the club, and making sure that each seat has at least one pair and preferably one set per person;

Then comes binocular usage. This is an important step since there are some non-intuitive pieces to this puzzle for everyday civilians (definition: non-members of the ENC!). Most importantly bending the binocular into the right shape for your eyes, twisting the eye-cups out (or in for eye-glass-wearers), use of the focussing wheel, and determining what that darned diopter-thingy does and at least setting it to the zero position for starters.

Then the all-important discussion about looking down-light for maximum advantage as opposed to staring at backlit silhouettes! At this point I like to describe my early birding experience, heading solo to Atim Creek near Spruce Grove and after a frustrating couple hours peering up-light at unidentified blackened silhouettes out on the water, concluding that I suck as a bird-watcher! (no comments please about whether this still applies!)

Then, usually a brief discussion of birding, bird-watching, and twitching. Did you know that the term birdwatching was first used in 1901, while 'bird' was first recorded as a verb in 1918. The term birding was also used for the practice of fowling or hunting with firearms, as in Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1602) "She laments sir... her husband goes this morning a-birding". The terms birding and birdwatch-



Scoping out the birds. Photo: Steve Knight



John Chapman, Peter DeMulder, and Jim Lange plan out the route. Photo: S.Knight

2009, results were very similar, with I believe the median number of lifers as high as 10-12 species. Not bad for our volunteer efforts!

You might ask why this is important, and I can only relate this to my own journey into nature watching which started at the predecessor Snow Goose Festival to which I am eternally grateful. I clearly recall to this day my sense of amazement, at the sheer variety and diversity of life, of which we are but a small part, even here in our own immediate neighbourhood so to speak.

Before closing, there is one other aspect of the Snow Goose Chase that can be unparalleled and that we sometimes are privileged to witness. At the 2009 event we had stopped to scope a large flock of Geese on a pond immediately south of a farm property on the Ryley road. Due to good planning on

ing are today used interchangeably, although birding is preferred by many since this includes the auditory component involved in locating and identifying birds. Also, the term twitcher, sometimes misapplied as a synonym for birder, is reserved for those who travel long distances to see a rare bird that would then be "ticked" off on a "list". The term appeared in the 1950s, said to have originated from a phrase used to describe the nervous behaviour of Howard Medhurst, a British birdwatcher.

Now we are ready to discuss the definition of a lifer, NOT 'A prisoner serving a life sentence!'. More like 'Not bad - 55 species of birds, including 14 lifers for the day!'.

Also, lets not forget our mammalian and insect friends. Most chases I have been involved in serve up several species, hopefully including deer, ground squirrel and coyote, but sometimes even moose and badger .

Two key concepts I like to use in guiding are more or less diametrically opposed but both important to the day. The first is the all-important technique of remembering that a great view of a Blue Jay or a Red-winged Blackbird can be equally as rewarding to our audience as that distant 400 yards-view of a Merlin on a fence-post. So I like to mix up the sightings we highlight to our guests to include a little of both!

And if Dolores is at all involved, we usually have a ready-supply of snacks for any mid-morning and mid-afternoon lulls!

Because I was curious about how we were doing on the lifer-front, for 2008 and 2009 we did a brief survey of our bus participants Lifer count. In 2008, we had 43 species and individual patron results were as follows: 10-lifers, 3-lifers, 0, 11, 4, 10, 2, 10, 10, 4, 7, 5, 10, everything!, 22, 2, 3, 2, 2, 1, 25, 2, 2, 7, 4, and 8. Note that almost all guests had at least one life bird sighting! In

Gerald Romanchuk's part, the bus had stopped such that we were partially pulled in to the farm entrance without fully blocking it. With our patrons already outside and spotting scopes duly set up, we were fortunate that the farmer's daughter determined to make an exit from her house and head out in her vehicle. In doing so, and particularly with running back into the house because she must have forgotten something, she caused the flock to take flight and disgorge what we first thought were several hundred Snow, White-fronted, and Canada Geese. With the geese in the air, it was now quite clear that we had perhaps 5,000 geese in the air overhead, circling at



Scoping out the birds. Photo: Steve Knight

times right over our group! Nothing can compare to this visual and auditory experience and we guides immediately became experts in the eyes of our guests!

Steve Knight, Snow Goose Chase Volunteer

Snow Goose Chase 2009 - continued

Volunteers:

Claudia Bolli
 Hugh Campbell
 Bob Parsons
 Gerald Romanchuk
 Lynn Chandler
 Dale and Fred Dawson
 Peter Demulder
 Andrew Forrest
 Stan Gosche
 Ted Hindmarch
 Angela Hobson
 Don Delaney
 Rob Hughes
 Mike Jenkins
 Pat Jones
 Steve Knight
 Janos Kovacs
 Jim Lange

Jaye Lee
 Michelle Manley
 Curtis Manley
 Fred Martin
 Jim Morrison
 Jack Park
 Lisa Priestley
 Lance Steinke
 Brenda Shaughnessy
 Phil Trefrey
 Karen Tully
 Marvin Tully
 Eric Wallace
 Ingrid Yukes
 Linda Zimmerling
 Robin Brown
 Bob Gehlert
 Treva Piekema

John and Jean Chapman
 Ted Hindmarch
 Ben Verner
 Kristen Peck
 Kim Blomme
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 Roy Financial - St. Albert
 McBain Camera
 The Valley Zoo
 Alberta Conservation Association
 Epcor
 Champion Foods

House Finch in Alberta: A Good News Story

With the barrage of reports on declining numbers of birds world-wide, and the ever-increasing number of endangered species in Canada and elsewhere, it is reassuring and encouraging to write about a remarkable success story in Alberta. It concerns the House Finch, a cheery attractive passerine that is proving to be both adaptive and resilient – a relatively new addition to our provincial avifauna, and a species showing a recent rapidly increasing and expanding population.

If we look at Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs) for Alberta, then the last few years have shown an astonishing population explosion of House Finches within the province as far north as Edmonton and west to the foothills. The first records of House Finches on CBCs in Alberta came in the 1980s from Calgary, Edmonton and Claresholme; Doug and Theresa Dolman summarized House Finch numbers from CBCs in southern Alberta from 1987 to 2001 in the Lethbridge Naturalists Society's Newsletter. Records were somewhat sporadic during the 1980s and early 1990s, but starting with the 1993/1994 CBC, House Finches have been recorded annually within the province (Figure 1).

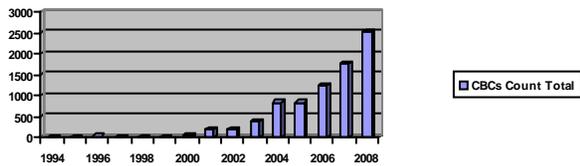


Figure 1. Total numbers of House Finches counted on all Alberta CBCs: 1994 - 2008



From one bird on one CBC count in 1993/1994, the species has rapidly increased to being reported on 17 CBCs, with a grand total of 2513 counted in the 2008/9 CBC. Note the rapid increase since 2002. House Finch reports from Calgary became annual

starting with the 1993/1994 count, but not in Edmonton until 2000/2001; however, the meteoric rise in numbers in Edmonton and surrounding counts are staggering (Figure 2).

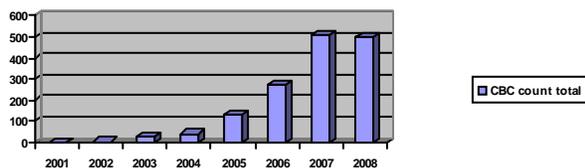


Figure 2. Total numbers of House Finches from the Edmonton CBCs; 2001 - 2008

As well as Edmonton, House Finches have now been reported in central Alberta on CBCs in St. Albert, Strathcona, Fort Saskatchewan and Devon during the last three years (Figure 3) with a grand total of almost 700 during the last CBC 2008-2009.

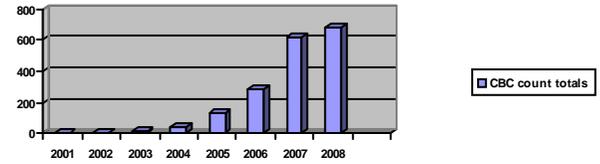


Figure 3. Total numbers of House Finches from counts in the Greater Edmonton area: 2001 - 2008.

In Edmonton, it is now among the ten most common species recorded – an amazing statistic when one considers that the species was essentially absent ten years ago. The spread of records in winter in urban/suburban areas indicates that the House Finch is likely a species that relies on well-stocked bird feeders to survive. More rural CBCs such as Elk Island, Wabumon and Opal have yet to record the species, and Tofield has one report, in 2006/7 of 9 individuals.

Summer records indicate that the species is attempting to gain a foothold in smaller communities across central Alberta. There have been reports in summer of House Finches in Grande Prairie (Margot Hervieux, pers. comm.), in Tofield (Lisa Priestley, pers. comm.), and since 2005 in Vegreville (Rob Hughes, pers. comm.), and Cold Lake, Bonnyville and probably Vilna (Ted Hindmarch and Richard Klauke, pers. com.). An intriguing question is where such pioneering House Finches go in winter, on the assumption that they do indeed migrate away from such communities.

The origin of House Finches in Alberta is quite the puzzle, and the likely answer is from the west, south and east. If this current wave of House Finches is indeed coming into the province from the east and southeast, then we might expect the highest CBCs during the late 1990s and early 2000s to be in the southeast and south; this appears to be the case as the Medicine Hat CBCs at the turn of the century were the highest in the province (for example, 137 on the 2000/2001 CBC) and the small community of Nanton south of Calgary has consistently reported high numbers (for example, 263 in the 2008/2009 CBC). Currently, Calgary leads the province in highest count for a CBC with 1006 in 2008/2009, followed by Edmonton and Medicine Hat.

It is not often that we have the opportunity to track the invasion of a species into a geographic area as the invasion actually happens. We have that chance now. It will be of considerable interest to track the continuing invasion of House Finches into central and perhaps northern Alberta, and the subsequent consolidation of its range.

Thanks to all the folks who responded to Gerald Romanchuk's request on Alberta Birds for information on House Finches, to Brian Ritchie for valuable literature of House Finches, and to other members of the ABRC for useful discussions; such help was much appreciated.

Richard Napton

The Wildbird General Store Celebrates 20 years!



We are planning a week of special events in September to thank our customers and celebrate our 20th Anniversary. Please watch our website (www.wildbirdgeneralstore.com) for further details. In the meantime, come in and browse our expanded book section with recently arrived Antiquarian/collector Natural History and Birding Books. Featured in our

mini Gallery are beautiful Giclee Canvas Photo Art Prints by Peter Stahl.

And if you are planning to be outdoors, or traveling a lot this summer check out our expanded Tilley Adventure Clothing section. Classic lines and new Smart Fabric and light-weight choices. And as always, the friendliest, most knowledgeable bird watching and feeding advice.

WGS OPEN HOUSE

Help us celebrate 20 years!
September 25 from 7:00 til 10:00 pm
Alberta Authors Evening
With special guests, John Acorn
& Jack Clements

New in the Wildbird General Store:

For your antique book needs we are carrying a large collection of Antiquariat Books. Ranging from A General History Of Quadrupeds (1811) our oldest book, to American Ornithology Volumes I, II, and III (1876), and Mammals of Amazonia Volume I General Introduction and Primates (1945).

Though the collection is fairly extensive we are looking to expand.

We buy and sell Antiquariat books.

A Spring to Remember - The Year Of the Orioles

Every day in The Wildbird General Store is an adventure. The customers are varied and many have interesting tales to tell about all the goings on in their back yards.

This spring we have many complaints about the drought and the low water levels all around the city and adjacent communities. Jim Lange's Hawk Surveys near Tofield and Beaverhill certainly have shown that very clearly. Last year we had 8 water bodies on our survey route and this year that was reduced to 3 rather pathetic "puddles" of water. Our counts reflect that change both in the species composition and the number of birds seen.

Was it a possible omen of things to come when we had seen a single Western Kingbird? Are prairie species moving north? Who knows what the future holds? Our task is to continue recording and observing changes as they occur.

A huge surprise this spring has been the number of orioles spotted all around Edmonton. Last year we received many calls from feeder watchers seeing their first Rose-breasted Grosbeaks. This spring, 2009, is definitely the year of the oriole! From the last week of May into June, the phone was ringing off the hook

"Do you have oriole feeders?"

Daily there has been a steady stream of customers seeking oriole feeders in the store. Many back yard bird



Baltimore Oriole

enthusiasts informed us about orioles trying to feed on the nectar in hummingbird feeders. Being that much larger, these black and orange beauties often damage the smaller feeders while contorting their bodies to reach the precious food. In addition to the specifically designed oriole-sized nectar feeders, orioles love fruit. We tell our customers to put out cut-up oranges, apples and grapes, grape jelly and also set out dried meal worms all foods that these "blackbirds" relish.

Why blackbirds? Although not entirely black in color, orioles belong to the blackbird family known scientifically as the Icteridae. Other species in that family include meadowlarks, cowbirds, and yes the many "real" blackbirds such as the red-winged blackbirds and others. There are 24 species of orioles in the world, all of which are New World species, meaning that they occur in North and South America.

The question is, "Why so many Orioles this year?" The most logical answer is that last year's hatch and survival was much higher than in other years. Such increases usually follow outbreaks of certain insect populations. It is tempting to attribute that to the pine beetle infestations but that is certainly not the case, as these beetles are far too small to be a likely food source. And in any case our orioles are less of a mountain species and more aspen parkland oriented. So we may need to depend on entomologists for an answer. Another, less likely explanation, is that orioles are facing a crisis in the form of a food shortage this spring and are therefore descending on feeders in greater numbers than before. Of course there may be other explanations and we can speculate on that. Do call the store or leave a message, if something comes to mind that we have overlooked.

(780)439-7333

info@wildbirdgeneralstore.com

Lu Carbyn

Photographing Edmonton's River Valley Plants

As many of you know, earlier in the summer Morvyn, our e-communications coordinator, kindly put out my updated request for photos of plants that grow in Edmonton's river valley. Last year I made the same request and several people responded, particularly Don Gordon, Cecily Mills, Dennis Miller, Ron and Arlene Miller and Tiina Payson, and I thank them for their contributions. However, the photos I received covered only a fraction of the plants that are found in the river valley, and so a new season (2009) provided an opportunity to fill in some gaps. This spring I included a list of species as a guide for contributors.

My idea is to produce a laminated, fold-out brochure with colour photos of the plants such that they can be identified by people walking along the river valley trails. As a visitor to parks where I am not familiar with the flora I know I am always very grateful for local interpretive material. Contributors' names will be listed in the brochure.

Of course, as I write this in the third week of July, we are well into the flowering season, and I'm hoping that some excellent digital images are already sitting on people's computers or CDs. The following species still present photo opportunities, however:

- the ferns, e.g., fragile bladder fern, narrow spinulose shield fern, oak fern and ostrich fern. (With this last species be sure to look for the fertile (spore-bearing) frond which is a narrower, stiffly upright frond, turning brown as it ripens, within the broader green sterile fronds)
- the fruit of our common juniper in the river valley (it is easiest to find in the southwest ravines of Edmonton, but photos from elsewhere will do)
- most of the grasses on the list
- sedges in fruit
- Most orchids are past flowering, but the very common green bog orchid (*Platanthera* species, formerly *Habenaria hyperborea*) is still in flower as is the bracted bog orchid (*Coeloglossum viride*) – if you can find it
- Various members of the goosefoot family, (*Chenopodium* and *Atriplex* species Good places to look for *Chenopodiums* are disturbed ground including the south-facing bentonitic slopes along Whitemud Creek
- Two late-flowering members of the honeysuckle family, the shrubby buckbrush (open areas) and snowberry (woods)
- several buttercup species are in flower and fruit
- rose family members such as yellow avens and agrimony
- the wintergreens, *Orthilia* and *Pyrola* species. Look especially for the lovely white columns of the elliptic-leaved wintergreen.
- The composite or daisy family includes many members that flower late in the season. Look for yarrow (I find that a real challenge to photograph – if the much-divided, feathery leaves are in focus then the flowers come out as a white blur!). The weedy burdocks, the

wormwoods (*Artemisia* spp), both native and weedy, the asters, sunflowers, hawkweeds, ragworts and gold-enrods are now at their best or bear promise as buds.

- Since plants of moist riparian areas, as well as actual aquatics, tend to bloom rather late, habitats close to creek and river banks are good places to look for subjects in flower. Docks (*Rumex* spp.) are an example, as are willowherbs. Related to the common fireweed (itself very photogenic), willowherb flowers are miniature versions of fireweed flowers. Look for marsh hedge-nettle in the mint family, and the delicate yellow fringed loose-strife, a member of the primrose family. Some of the rushes (*Juncus* spp.) may catch your eye as they start to form fruit. The group of unrelated plants with narrow grass-like leaves and inconspicuous flowers known as graminoids (grasses, sedges and rushes) are always difficult to photograph successfully, but hey, challenge yourself!
- As for some of the more unusual plants that are around at this time of year I'd include the uncommon but instantly recognizable Indian Pipe (woods and shrubby areas) and the purple prairie-clover, which as its name suggests is a member of the pea family although you wouldn't guess it at first sight. This latter grows on the steep south-facing slope above the Rainbow Valley campground, which incidentally is a source of several other prairie-type species. On the steeper unvegetated slopes closer to the creek you'll see the rare Herriot's sage.
- Don't of course forget all the fruits which are in evidence at this time, and which for some species are more recognizable than the flowers themselves. Examples are strawberries, several raspberry species, saskatoon, Canada buffaloberry, the two high-bush cranberry species, bunchberry, northern bastard toad-flax, fairybells and others, including a few spectacular seed-heads of goat's-beard.

As before, I'll be happy to try to identify any plants for which you need identification or confirmation, preferably in another month or so when the field season slackens off and I'm less busy. You learn much more doing your own id, though, so don't be afraid to consult flower guides freely, especially the locally relevant "Plants of the Western Boreal Forest and Aspen Parkland" by Johnson, Kershaw, et al.

Your photographs, by the way, should not so much strive to be a work of art as a typical representation of the plant that would allow you to recognize the plant as you would see it in the bush. Thus, although closer shots are usually better, an extreme close up of a flower does not necessarily make it recognizable. Analyze the photos in guide books of species that you know. If a plant is instantly recognizable from the photo, you may wish to try a similar angle.

My contact information is: email: nutmeg@planet.eon.net; phone: 780-481-1525. I have updated the species list slightly, and can email/mail it to anyone who asks for it.

Meanwhile, happy plant hunting with your camera!

Patsy Cotterill

Wings Of Creation; A Celebration Of Birds

As a child, like all children do, I looked through eyes of fantasy and wonder at the world around me oohing and awing the delights of dragonflies sparkling over water or ladybugs alighting while sitting amongst the flowers. Happily surrounded by dense bush filled with ferns, huckleberries and the smell of red cedar, I could be found roaming the woods as though it were wild, uncharted territory or wading knee-deep in Lang creek for minnows or Plett's swamp to catch frogs. Being blessed with acres of bush near a salmon run river that emptied into the Pacific ocean only a few miles away, my younger brother, our friends and I spent many unsupervised hours of imaginative play in this fertile forest that was our Narnia.

I remember as a young child my father took me to his potato patch in the "back 40" as he called it. He had me sit still and quiet at the edge of the plot in the shade of the salmonberry bushes while he went back to hoeing. Soon a doe ventured near the plot sniffing at the air. "Its okay Rosie" my father gently said, "its all right, this is my baby I have brought to meet you." After sniffing the air a few more moments Rosie settled her fawn down under a bush about ten feet away from where my father had placed me. Trust between the two had been established a few years before and it never failed that she brought her fawns to my father each spring though one year she never appeared and my saddened father feared she had been shot.

The old shack we once lived in had an open addition that may have at one time been a tool shed or carport. Each year barn swallows returned to build their mud nests, swooping past our heads if we crossed the invisible line into their territory while raising their brood. And did we ever get heck if found playing in the shed as mother said the swallows were a blessing of good fortune and she didn't want them disturbed. Looking back on it, I realize that when you have to raise nine children in a two room shack, chop and haul wood for the stove to cook and heat with, and, most pleasant of all, teach your young to use the "outhouse" well, I guess you need all the blessing you can get.

My parents greatly respected the Earth and its inhabitants doing their part in recycling and reusing what they could. Mom was always busy picking berries, putting up preserves, raising chickens for eggs and food, trading eggs for milk with a neighbor who had a cow and living off the land by organic gardening which was a necessity to feed her large brood plus my grandfather.

My mother's lovingly tended flower gardens were her sanctuary,



Migration Call. Artwork by Teresa Stieben

which delightfully attracted hummingbirds and a variety of butterflies. Sadly, by the time I was a teenager, the monarch butterflies were no longer seen due possibly to overwintering areas being clear-cut in the States. Eagles nesting along the coastline had rapidly declined due to DDT poisoning so whenever mother



Out of the Reeds, Blue-winged Teal. Artwork by Teresa Stieben

caught sight of an eagle overhead it was always cause for joy and adventure that she shared by calling out so us children could watch in wonder as the eagles playing in the thermals seemingly dissolved into the sky. Now again, thankfully, eagles gather in large groups feeding on fish carcasses that spawn along the coast.

Late summer and fall brought frequent visitors to our backyard apple trees. A common, yet exciting and entertaining sight was of my mother hollering and banging pot lids together to chase off the black bears when the dog had not caught the scent to do her job. Often the bears were brazen enough to venture right onto the porch the dog was sleeping under.

I learned early that I was not to show fear of bears. My mother once was late meeting me at the top of the hill when I was walking home from kindergarten and a black bear stepped out of the underbrush right in front of me. It stopped and stared. Fearful of this large shadow of fur, I began to sob until I heard a clapping of hands and mom telling me not to be such a big sissy. The poor bear startled and bolted sensing it was between a mother and cub it vanished into the brush on the opposite side of the gravel road as though it never had been.

These are the kinds of experiences that surface when I think about that passion which pulls me to depict the world around me with brush and paint. As a young child I drew on brown paper grocery bags that were destined as gifts to the gods; fire gods that is, as mom needed the paper to light the wood stove to shed the mornings chill. I drew in the mud of the yard after a rain and drew in the sand on the shore knowing the tides would wash the slate clean each day to start anew. While others played softball I drew in outfield dirt, its no wonder I was last pick for any sports team.

During my teen years as I attempted to depict the animals and eagles around me I found myself becoming more fascinated by the variety in peoples faces that peered out of National Geographic Magazine. My first prize was garnered at age eleven at the Powell River Exhibition of a face lightly drawn in pencil. My younger brother would quickly vacate the room when he saw me coming with my sketch book, having posed for me once he apparently felt that one sitting was enough. As a self taught artist I have painted commission portraits, landscapes with eagles or maybe a raven or two, deer, floral still-life's and spiritual images that recall myths and parables.

A few years back I lovingly painted a memorial dedicated to my mother. Purple lilacs, orange lilies and pink flowers topped with yellow swallowtails and other butterflies flowed down the left side and across the base of the canvas, all off-centered by a single orchid, hummingbird and a photo of my mother when she was twenty. The painting easily took form as I had good reference material for flowers and butterflies as my mother was always sending me out to capture her garden and its inhabitants on film. Not so easy was the memorial for my father as dad spent a majority of his home time in the back forty tending his potato patch and culling back blackberry brambles. I needed bush and I needed birds other than ravens and eagles, I had no reference material. Luckily I was invited on a road trip to B.C. and was able to capture a few birds and regain the feeling of home as we camped overnight at a beach campsite a few miles from where I grew up and slept under the cool canopy of moss and cedar at Goldstream Park in Victoria.

On dads painting a single white iris and a photo of him overseas in WW2 uniform is a little out of place against the nine small birds that hide in the forest greens. The war photo was used due my belief he never really came back from that war. The scars were too deep that held him prisoner and the only semblance of peace he had was mindfully turning the soil for his potato patch in the bush.

In October, 2006 these paintings were exhibited at Kings College University in Edmonton. On opening night I noticed a young lady of eight entranced before the painting of my father. Spurred by her interest I went and talked with her, whereupon she whispered "it's so alive" I was thrilled, her words were the highlight of my evening. That experience pulled on the desire to obtain more photos to paint from. It all began innocently enough walking around Mirror Lake in Camrose delightfully photographing the variety of birds and ducks that use the lake and surrounding bush for nesting or as a stopover point. Soon the pleasure of really watching the winged ones began to bewitch me. Some days I would walk around the lake snapping every bird I saw even though most were too far away. Others days only having the stamina to walk the few blocks to the lake unladen with camera I was content to view any bird swoop by yet silently wishing to capture them all.

One day I suggested a picnic to Gerald Delorme to get me out of Camrose. So, off we went looking for a scenic place to dine. The poor man, mostly heard "Stop, I see a duck!" He would have to stop if it were safe to do so. With each ensuing picnic, a few more photos were acquired and soon Gerald was specifically driving the country roads looking for ponds. I am grateful to have in my life a willing accomplice in the bird hunt. He carries my camera when I am not able and has called loons, hawks and a great horned owl closer for me to photograph.

Next came the used bookstore. After all, now I needed to identify what I was capturing such as american avocets, and hey, I found out there are more than one type of sparrow, and not all gulls are alike. They change their garb a few times before maturity. And a night heron! Wow! I had only known great blue herons and green herons. So much to see. So much to learn. That's it, I was hooked.

The winter of 2007/2008 was spent painting small birds, geese, and a sora in watercolor. Then this winter of 2008/2009, I painted a variety of birds in acrylic on canvas. Benefits of painting are twofold. I end up with a houseful of birds and the meditative aspect of painting helps block the pain of Ehlers Danlos Syndrome, a genetic quirk of nature that has left my body susceptible to severe dislocations and chronic pain. An added bonus is that the compilation of these past few years work, thirty-two bird-related paintings, have been exhibited at the Donalda Gallery for the Arts in Donalda in the historical Bank of Canada Building.

The adventure has just begun. This winter a pop-bottle feeder was hung enticing a wonderful committee of chickadees, finches and nuthatches to frequent. Especially when it's cold and blowing snow. They fluff and huddle up close to the trunk flitting down to the feeder for nourishment as needed. Being blessed by their enjoyable presence, watching and learning about their traits of character, and noting size difference between the four red-breasted nuthatches that visit is fascinating. The wily squirrel who cannot get at the seeds in the bottle regularly vacuums the tree bark for seeds that the nuthatches wedge into the cracks. It seems the more I get out to photograph birds the more ideas I get for future paintings. The hardest part is deciding on which bird to depict first, and happily the list keeps growing.

In a way I feel that painting birds is a coming home to my roots. Back to the pure enjoyment of being alive and out enjoying nature, though I don't catch frogs anymore and need a buddy to walk with as I wear leg braces, and need help carrying the camera, I am still that child who delights in the sun sparkle dancing on dragonfly wings, sweet berries on the bush and the scent of rich earth underfoot.

To view my paintings and bird photos online <http://teresastieben.blogspot.com/>

"Wings of Creation, an exhibition of birds" will be showing in the Atrium at The Kings University College, 9125 50 Street NW Edmonton from mid Sept till end of Nov 2009. Atrium is open to the public daily from 8 am to 10 pm

Teresa Stieben, BFA with Distinction



Summer Storm, Red-tailed Hawk. Artwork by Teresa Stieben

Wing-tagged Turkey Vultures That Might be Seen in Alberta

Alberta naturalists for many years may have opportunities to see Turkey Vultures bearing patagial wing-tags of at least four color combinations.

Please report all sightings of wing-tagged Turkey Vultures to the specific contact people listed below. Include the date, location, color of the tag and its code (letters, numbers), the wing (right or left) to which the tag is attached, and the circumstances of the sighting (bird was alone, in a flock, flying or perched, feeding or roosting, etc.).



Rick Morse holds a freshly tagged Turkey Vulture. Photo: Wayne Nelson

East-central Alberta -- Yellow tag with black letters

Contact: Rick Morse, 8 Gaylord Place, St. Albert, AB T8N 0S8 Canada ricmorse@shaw.ca 1-(780)-405-7389.

Beginning in 2008, vultures were tagged at their nests in abandoned farm buildings, in a large block east of Edmonton to the Alberta-Saskatchewan border. This vulture study was begun in 2003 to investigate the productivity and distribution of these birds, by Wayne Nelson, Floyd Kunnas, and Dave Moore of the Alberta Fish and Wildlife Division. Nelson, now retired from AFD, and Rick Morse, a Master Banding Permit holder from St. Albert, received training in Saskatchewan in early August 2008 and then in Alberta began a long-term wing-tagging project by tagging 20 nestlings at 11 nests. Several of these were reported flying near their homes, one died as a result of a vehicle strike in its first month of flying, and two vultures with yellow wing-tags were seen together in northern Venezuela in mid-January 2009 (!) (but their individual ID's could not be determined). Also, please report ANY vultures that you see on roofs or in windows of old farm buildings!

TURKEY VULTURES: A PHOTOGRAPHIC GUIDE FOR AGING NESTLINGS. R. W. Nelson, D. Moore, F. Kunnas, and R. Morse. 2009. Fish and Wildlife Division, Alberta Species at Risk Report No. 124. Edmonton, AB. 44 pp. Descriptions and 80+ color photos of known-age nestlings, "... are intended to allow users ... to estimate the age of nestling Turkey Vultures, from their own photographs, to within +/- two days, without handling the young birds." Part of an ongoing study at the northern edge of the breeding range. Available as a pdf download at: <http://srd.alberta.ca/fishwildlife/speciesatrisk/projectreports.aspx>

Saskatchewan – Green tag with white letter and numbers

Contact: C. Stuart Houston, 863 University Drive, Saskatoon, SK S7N 0J8 Canada stuart.houston@usask.ca 1-(306)-244-0742 before 9 p.m. CST.

From 2003 to the present, over 300 vultures in central and southern Saskatchewan at nests in abandoned farm buildings have received green wing-tags, in a long-term project conducted by Stuart Houston and his team of Brent Terry, Marten Stoffel, and Michael Blom. Their wing-tagged vultures have been seen in Venezuela, back home in Saskatchewan and at places in-between, and found as a road-kill and recorded on a hunter's trail cam in central Alberta. Soon some of these birds will become breeders and will contribute to the study's other exciting goals. (Some red-green color-blind people may see these tags as a *dark blue*, but definitely *not* a light blue.)

Venezuela 'wintering' North American vultures – red tag with white numbers, ALSO pale blue tag with black numbers.

Contact: Keith Bildstein, Hawk Mountain Sanctuary Acopian Center for Conservation Learning, 410 Summer Valley Road, Orwigsburg, PA 17961 U.S.A. [Bildstein@hawkmtn.org](mailto:KBildstein@hawkmtn.org) 1-(570)-943-3411 ext. 108.

To try to look at the migration of North American vultures from the southern end, in our winters of 2006-07 and 2008-09, over 300 vultures were tagged in NW Venezuela, with red tags at the Maracaibo zoo, and with pale blue tags at Barquisemeto, in a cooperative project between Venezuela researchers and Hawk Mountain Sanctuary researchers. These birds might be seen anywhere East of the Rockies in the U.S.A. and southern Canada.

R. Wayne Nelson, 4218 – 63 Street, Camrose, AB T4V 2W2 wanelson@telus.net (780) 672-4363



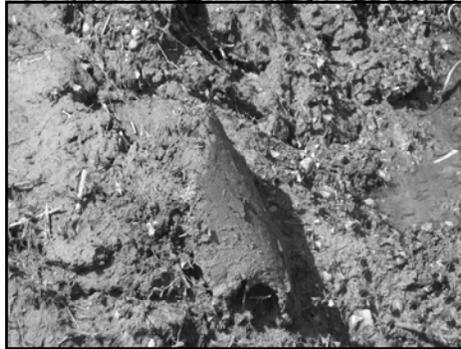
Turkey Vulture fledgling. Photo: Wayne Nelson

Where have all the Skippers come from?

Last July 19th and 20th while visiting Zeiner campground on Pigeon Lake I noticed large numbers of “folded wing” skippers on the flowers along the shore and to a lesser extent in the adjacent woods. Unfortunately I didn’t have my butterfly book with me and I didn’t take a captive: I thought the characteristic way in which the upper pair of wings was held at an angle to the lower ones would make for easy identification later. Alas, not so. Those of us not familiar with a group of organisms always underestimate nature’s diversity! However, I think that those butterflies I saw on the tufted vetch on the beach could have been Garita Skippers – they were orange, entirely unmottled, and also darkish, and the angled-wing character was very prominent.

From Zeiner I moved on to Strawberry Creek Natural Area, a heavily wooded parcel of Crown land about 6 km to the west, and explored the creek area in its south-east corner. Here were many more skippers, sipping nectar and on the wing, so many that some flew into my car when I opened the doors. A patch of mud at the

edge of the creek was absolutely covered with them (see photo). It seemed to me they were different from the ones at Zeiner, a plain orange also, but lighter, possibly a bit smaller, and with the angled wing character less obvious.



Skippers Photo: Patsy Cotterill

Could these have been European skippers? Would any of our bug experts care to comment? At any rate, their numbers were remarkable – they have obviously had a good year!

By the way, the creek in this natural area is very interesting. Impounded at three if not four levels by beavers, it is very attractive to water birds, as well as having rich riparian vegetation. The mixedwoods to the east are home to no fewer than three provincially rare plants (originally four). I think we naturalists need to make a point of visiting some of the Province’s more obscure natural areas, especially to the west, and to make

our appreciation well known. Heaven forbid that a cash-strapped provincial government should attempt to sell them off!

Patsy Cotterill

Who am I?



Last issue’s quiz photo (at left) was pretty tough, but high marks go to Alan Hingston, who correctly identified the bird as a Hooded Merganser (right).

Notice the white streaks running down the ducks back . No other diving ducks would show this field mark.



Announcement:
Edmonton Nature Club
Annual General Meeting
& Members Slide Night
 September 18, 2009

7:00 pm, Percy Page Center

If you have digital photos to share please bring them to the meeting on a CD or memory stick.



This issue’s quiz should be easier. Can you identify the bird above?

Please submit your answer to the editor.

Wildbird General Store Bird Sightings Report



Seasonal Bird Report - late Nov.2008 to June 10, 2009

Raptors

Short-eared Owls were in abundance last fall & early winter on the dry lakebed of Beaverhill Lake, between Francis Point & the corrals on the NW corner. Gerald Romanchuk counted 30 at Francis Point Dec.01, & Dec.07, then

Jim Morrison & Gerald counted 48 between Francis Point & the corrals. On Dec. 26, Gerald located 28 still hunting the former lakeshore out from the corrals. That was the end of the Beaverhill spectacular until Eric Wallace sighted 1 at Francis Point on May 01. Only other record was from south of Villeneuve on the Dec.26 St. Albert Xmas Count.

Boreal Owls were reported in high numbers with most records from St. Albert & Edmonton. The first report was on Dec. 19 (Edmonton Xmas Count – Bruce McNabb) in Mill Creek ravine. Next was one in the St. Albert Spruce Lot on Dec. 26, another sighting from St. Albert on Jan.10 by Percy Zalasky, one at 117B St. & 36A Ave. Jan.25 by L. Gallagher. Ruth Pollard, of the Westlock News took a great photo of one in her yard just south of Westlock in late Jan. Michelle Munro found a dead one near the junction of the Anthony Henday & Whitemud Fwy on Feb.18 (result of a vehicle collision). On Feb.19 Percy Zalasky had another sighting just south of Big Lake while Jack & Fran Clements reported one Feb. 23 in Aspen Gardens. We finish off where it all began with a sighting Mar.30 from the Spruce Lot.



Boreal Owl

Great Gray Owls started to appear in numbers in the Flatbush-Chisolm-Slave Lake corridor in late Nov. Only 2 were seen on the Opal Xmas count Jan. 01 & there were very few reports from there all winter. Fred Corbett located 1 just south of Boyle on Jan.02, 2 were seen on the Wabamun Xmas Count Jan. 03, while Bernard Van Os reported 1 north of Bon Accord Jan.1-7. Marc Demers & Trevor Roper found 4 north of Opal Jan.18. & after mid-Jan. I was seeing several each trip near the Goodridge Lake Peat Moss Plant (Dapp Power) north of Sec. #661 on Rge. Rd. 20 & 21 as well as along Sec.#801 south of Cross Lake (Jim Lange & others). A single report from Rocky Mountain House on Feb.3, and another sighting from north of Wabamun on Mar.14. The high numbers came from Ray Cromie & associates at the

end of March during a drive between Mitsue & along the Tieland Rd. north of Flatbush, when they located 22 individuals in one day!



Short-eared Owl

Hawk Owls were first reported by Ray Cromie Nov. 26 in the Flatbush area, & again on Nov.30 when 10 were seen in the Chisolm area. Fred Corbett reported one from the Boyle area Nov.24. John Folinsee photographed one Dec.18 in the Lendrum area the day before the Edmonton Xmas Count, however it was not seen during the Count! On Feb.01, Ray Cromie & Jack Park found 8 in the Chisolm area, Mar. 13. Mar. 21, Janet Watkinson & I located one next to the Peat Moss Plant. In late Mar. during the same trip for the Great Gray's, Rae Cromie, Marc Demers & group found 46 between Tieland Rd. & Mitsue. It is no wonder there were none at Opal this winter as Ray was keeping them well fed elsewhere!!

Pygmy Owl – one was seen by Ed Mah-Lim in Wabamun townsite during the Count Jan.03. Fred Whitley sighted one Feb. 25 along Sec. #801 in the Black Bear Grazing Reserve. On Mar.14, Hardy Pletz sighted one north of Wetaskiwin. Heather Ronnes & Dale Dawson heard one April 18 in the Cross Lake campground responding to a taped call during their Owl Survey. * None were heard or seen at Misty Ridge during the reporting period so I will try again this fall!

Barred Owl - only a couple of reports, first from south of Boyle Jan.2, Fred Corbett & I heard one call four times in a row at dusk in Cross Lake Park Feb.22. A pair was heard calling NW of Elk Island during an ENC trip April 18. John Chapman reported seeing one in Whitemud Ravine on June 2, 2009.

Snowy Owl - very few reports until later into the winter. Several were seen south of Tofield in early Dec. & then they started to show up north of St. Albert & across to the Gibbons area by early Feb. On April 18 Terry Thormin & Stan Gosche reported 7 east of the DU Wetland on Sec. #626 near Beaverhill Lake. In early winter the Taber-Lethbridge area was reporting high numbers so Snowy Owls were possibly wintering into the United States.

Gyrfalcon were scarce this winter with an immature seen briefly at the Grain Terminal in north Edmonton Jan. 7. It showed up

quite regular, but made no serious attempts at catching pigeons, just scaring them. On Feb.15 an adult Gray morph was seen by Percy Zalasky at the NW corner of Egg Lake, while on Feb.19, Gerald Romanchuk saw an immature north of Morinville.

Prairie Falcon - one seen south of Villeneuve on the St. Albert Count by Alan Hingston & Stan Gosche & another probable seen on Creamery Rd. at Tofield by John Chapman on the April 25 Snow Goose Chase. **Peregrine Falcon** were first reported by Fred Whiley April 2 on the Sun Life building while Ed Mah-Lim sighted one April 3 by the hack box on the Beverly Bridge. Fred Whiley reported them back at Inland Cement April 12, while several were seen north of Holden during the Snow Goose Chase April 25, & one at Hwy14 & Rge.Rd 180 by Curtis & Michelle Manly April 26. Eric Wallace & group witnessed one trying to capture a Lesser Yellowlegs at Hastings Lake on May 01. The prey escaped by hiding amongst several Canada Geese. During May, several Peregrines were seen over the mudflats at Mundare Beach on the east side of Beaverhill.

Cooper's Hawk reports starting with Jan.2 in Melton Ravine in Spruce Grove - Jean Horne, one seen by Jim Lange Feb.19 in Janet Watkinson's St. Albert yard. One reported from Elk Island during an ENC trip April 18, Mill Woods April 24 & the last report was by Ed Mah -Lim on the Beaverhill Hawk Survey May 10. Several **Goshawk** were reported starting Dec.7 in Goldbar Park, ENC trip. There were separate reports by Heather Ronnes & myself from Cross Lake during April with the bird calling & another sighting from south of the Vega Sandhills during an ENC trip April 5, Jim Lange. During the ForFar Park May Species Count one was observed flying slowly over the tree tops at mid-day near Bolloque Lake (JL). A couple of **Osprey** were reported this spring at Big Lake April 13, Peter Demulder & at Cross Lake they were back by April 30, Jim Lange.



Prairie Falcon

Bald Eagle were scarce in the area this winter & were late coming back this spring. The migration at Misty Ridge this year was basically a non event and most days just fizzled with no movement. The best day was Mar.19 when Fred Whiley & I sighted 11 including the nesting pair, however no Golden Eagle were seen at Misty Ridge this spring. **Turkey Vulture (2)** were reported by Graham at Victoria Settlement April 29, while

Gerald Romanchuk observed a bird during the Snow Goose Chase which he thought was a Vulture and they are seen in the Beaverhill area on occasion. Myself and a guest birder from Clyde saw one May 13 soaring just north of Wakamao Lake.

Waterfowl started with a Pacific Loon overwintering at Keepphills seen by numerous birders as of Jan.16, along with 10 Tundra

Swans overwintering. The first Canada Geese were back in the Edmonton area on Mar.18 & 19. That same day Fred Whiley & myself sighted a lone goose flying over Sec. #661 just west of Dapp. Mar.21 Janet Watkinson & I saw one (maybe the same bird) flying back south over Misty Ridge - changed its mind about spring! The first reports of Snow Geese in numbers came on April 10 with Rob Hughes seeing thousands flying over the SE corner of Beaverhill Lake, while Gerald Romanchuk reported



Barrow's Goldeneye

seeing thousands coming & going from the Mundare Beach area on April 19. During the Snow Goose Chase they were very elusive & not staying in any one spot mainly due to the dry conditions at Beaverhill Lake. The buses chased them to the Holden & Ryley areas with some success. At the same time Martin Sharp sighted a dark morph Ross Goose in a pond next to the Ryley Landfill. Dark morph Ross Geese are rarely seen in this area. Rob Hughes also reported seeing huge flocks of Snow Geese on May 2 east of Lavoy.

Meanwhile on April 24, Barb Collier located a pair of Wood Ducks near Lily Lake. Fred Whiley sighted a Barrow's Goldeneye in Hermitage Park on April 12. Also the same day 12 Pelicans were reported by Brian Hornsby at Hastings Lake. Meanwhile a group of 15-20 were hanging out next to the bridge in Cross Lake Park April 30. On April 11, several Eurasian Wigeon were reported from the Beaverhill area. One made a touch & go landing beside the Sunday April 26 Snow Goose bus as seen by Gerald Romanchuk & one other birder. Tundra Swans were migrating through in good numbers by mid-April with scattered small groups in the fields all the way to Misty Ridge April 16, Jim Lange & Fred Whiley.

Shorebirds - other than Lesser & Greater Yellowlegs, the more diverse selection of shorebirds started towards the end of April with Avocets reported by Fred Whiley April22, from the old coal pit (Quarry) just south of Tofield. He also was fortunate to find several Black-neck Stilts at Lyseng Reservoir near Armena on April 28. There were no reports of Stilts from Beaverhill this spring most likely the result of the dry conditions at Amisk Creek and other traditional locations where they have nested in other years. For those birders with both the time & physical ability to make the long hike out, a good cross section of shorebirds were being seen at Mundare Beach. Pectoral, Semipalmated, Least, Baird's, & Spotted Sandpipers along with Black-bellied, Golden & Semipalmated Plovers, Willet, Marbled Godwit (no Hudsonian Godwits this spring at Beaverhill), as well as Dowitchers.

Heather Ronnes & Dale Dawson saw 2 Hudsonian Godwit May 1 at Murray Marsh. Remember the 190+ seen at Kallal Meadows during the Snow Goose Chase a couple years back? What

a treat that was. Fred Whiley & I observed a good variety of shorebirds this spring near Clyde on Bouchard Lake & the north end of Wakamao Lake with all the above mentioned species as well as a Ruddy Turnstone on May 23 observed by myself & a guest birder from Clyde. Avocets are in record numbers there & Wakamao Lake with numerous pairs now nesting on Bouchard Lake. Water levels in the area are good offering good waterfowl variety as well.

The big news in the Edmonton area is Gerald Romanchuk's sighting of a **Snowy Plover** at the Cooking Lake Airport on the evening of June 2, 2009 a bird which could easily be mistaken for a Piping Plover or Semipalmated Plover. They are considered a vagrant through most of the region & breed in widely scattered locations across the south-central & south-west portions of the United States. In the U.S. they are listed as threatened due to human disturbance, habitat loss & degeneration (National Geographic Complete Birds of North America).



Snowy Plover

Sandhill Cranes were first reported at Beaverhill Lake area during an ENC trip April 19, Bob Parsons. During the Snow Goose Chase weekend they were widely scattered in the farm fields & due to poor weather conditions they were often grounded giving birders a great chance for a close look. There were thousand of Cranes in the air some afternoons if one was in the right place & time. The true spectacle of Sandhill migration came to the birders starting the Wildbird General Store Hawk Survey at Beaverhill Lake on the morning of May 3. The group was just starting to bird the Nature Centre just after 10:00 A.M. when the Cranes made their appearance on the eastern horizon. Although we were not close to them the sky was filled as far as one could see. It was very tough to do any other birding after seeing that.

Others- Dale Dawson reported having a Varied Thrush in her yard in Sherwood Park from late November until early January & Jack & Fran Clements reported one from Aspen Gardens on January 26. The big surprise was a Spotted Towhee which was reported overwintering at Tulliby Lake along the North Saskatchewan River approximately 12km west of the Alberta/Saskatchewan border & approximately 50km north of Lloydminster. This bird was being observed daily by Mrs. Young & was reported to the Wildbird General Store. The bird endured many days with overnight lows in the -40C range. This species is normally a breeding bird in the southeast part of the province. There have been a few scattered records from the Edmonton

area in early winter, however the birds don't stay.

On Jan.23, a Gray-crowned Rosy Finch was reported in Lendrum by Earl & Doris Cairns. A single Mourning Dove was still overwintering near Genesee as of early February. On Feb.4, Fred Whiley sighted a Black-backed Woodpecker in Kinnard Ravine, & maybe the same bird was seen there on Mar.21 during an ENC trip. This winter I did not find any in Cross Lake Park as they don't occur there in the same numbers as the Three-toed. Janet Watkinson has had great pleasure from late winter to present times watching a pair of Pileated Woodpeckers regularly coming to a suet log in her St. Albert yard.

Mountain Bluebird numbers this spring are still very low in the Beaverhill Lake area due to the high mortality during the April 2008 stretch of severe winter weather conditions. There are currently one pair at Francis Point and another along the road between Kallal Meadows & the Amisk Creek bridge. Along Sec.

#801 between Long Island Lake & Cross Lake there appear to be good numbers using the nest boxes along the fenceline. The first Purple Martin report came from Vermilion on April 11, with other reports from Antler Lake & Lindbrook on April 25 being closer to normal. They are now back in good numbers at the Beaverhill Lake Nature Centre, Tofield Golf Course, & another Martin House on the east edge of Tofield.

Rufous Hummingbirds were reported from Brule May 7 by Bob Morgan & Janet Watkinson was delighted to see one May 19 in her St. Albert yard. This species is a breeding bird in the Rockies but is seen occasionally sighted in the Edmonton area. Several Say's Phoebe were seen this spring with Florence & Cathy Woodward locating one May 7 in the Bittern Lake area, while Fred Whiley and I saw one at Bouchard Lake the next day. They usually pass through this area around the Mother's Day weekend and again the 2nd week of August on return migration.

Brooks May Species Count - highlights were Whimbrel 1000, Black-bellied Plover 5000, Broad-wing Hawk 3, Rough-legged Hawk 18, a Great Egret at Cassils (just west of Brooks). Gerald Romanchuk & Steve Knight found a **Wood Thrush** in Tillbrook Provincial Park. This species is normally found in the south-eastern United States. Some birder's have all the luck with finding rarities! Also a report from the May25/25 Writing on Stone May Species Count of **29 White-faced Ibis** at Pakowki Lake.

The other breaking news is **Sabine's Gulls**. On May 25 Dick Dekker counted 27 on South Cooking Lake flying along the south & west shore while Ed Mah-Lim & Bob Storms counted a huge flock of 210 on Cold Lake, the first weekend of June.

Well that's all the news folks, so keep those reports coming so we have an opportunity to share with other birders. Report them to the Northern Alberta Bird Hotline (780) 433-2473, Wildbird General Store (780) 439-7333 or the Store Website: wildbirdgeneralstore.com where the results are posted weekly.

Jim Lange, June 10, 2009

Jim Lange maintains the Northern Alberta Bird Hotline (433-2473) which is sponsored by the Wildbird General Store and the Edmonton Nature Club.

Backyard Visitors



This pair of Pileated Woodpeckers took a liking to Bert Yeudall's yard.



Airlee Fowler spotted this odd looking bird in her yard. It's a Dark-eyed Junco wearing aberrant plumage.



Adrian Thyse found this juvenile Cooper's Hawk finishing it's meal outside his bedroom window.

If you've got any photos of visitors to your yard, please send them in to the editor - geraldjr@telusplanet.net

Snow Goose Chase 2009



Photos by Steve Knight and
Gerald Romanchuk