

# THE PARKLAND NATURALIST



AUTUMN-WINTER 2010  
A PUBLICATION OF THE  
EDMONTON NATURE CLUB

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



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# Hodgson Wetland Planting

On May 15th this year, upwards of 60 volunteers, including members of the local Hong Park Tae-Kwon Do College and its master, parents, local residents, politicians, City of Edmonton staff, and other interested parties turned out to help plant native trees and shrubs in a mulch bed the City had recently created.



Photos by **Rodney AI and Patsy Cotterill**



The idea is to develop a naturally vegetated corridor with plenty of understory cover connecting the Hodgson natural wetland to the nearby power line corridor, which in turn provides a naturalized conduit to Whitemud Creek. This should eventually provide more freedom of movement for wildlife, including birds and amphibians, between the Creek and the wetland. Money to purchase the native nursery stock came from an ICLEI (International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives) grant awarded the previous year for an outreach project to increase local appreciation of the wetland and demonstrate the need for its stewardship.

## The Parkland Naturalist

is published by the Edmonton Nature Club.

Box 1111, Edmonton, AB T5J 2M1

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Applications may be downloaded from the ENC website.

#### Membership Rates:

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Full page \$75/1 issue \$200/4 issues

### On the cover

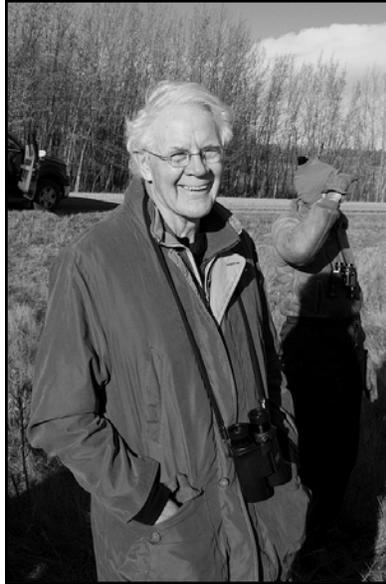
Astotin Lake Sunset by **Steve Knight**

## President's Message

Another spring, summer, and fall have come and gone, with many successful field trips in birding, nature, and plant studies completed. We would like to thank particularly Patsy Cotterill, Brian Stephens, Jim Lange, Gerald Romanchuk, Lu Carbyn, Ray Cromie, Chuck and Lisa Priestly, and Michael Frost for coordinating and leading the many trips that took place during this period. If I have forgotten someone, please forgive me.

Since the last edition of *The Parkland Naturalist* we have had a very successful Snow Goose Chase, organized by Bob Parsons on April 24 and 25, 2010. Leading up to the chase we had prolonged drought, and cold, wet, and windy weather the weekend of the chase. There were six buses of inner-city school children and three buses for the paying public. The scouts were able to find ducks, swans, geese, hawks, owls, and other species, (about 50) in all. The town of Tofield opened its community hall for various exhibits such as slide shows, owls with banding, bird carvers, pond exhibits, and displays from the Beaverhill Bird Observatory, the Royal Alberta Museum, and the Valley Zoo. Thanks to all the volunteers who made this event possible.

Getting sponsors for this event is becoming more difficult, and Bob Parsons and Lisa Szabo are applying for grants to help finance it. Many of the children who participated this year wrote letters to Bob Parsons about their experiences. See the Snow Goose Chase report on pages 6



*Our President, Ron Ramsey*

and 7 for letters from some of the children describing highlights of their trip, as well as a note to the sponsors from the Program Coordinator for the Inner-City Children's Program in Edmonton. Thanks to Bob Parsons, the Chase will go on next year!

We have an ongoing pursuit of a new site for monthly meetings when the Royal Alberta Museum closes at the end of March 2011. Many sites have been considered. The RAM will be difficult to replace, but we have a couple of possibilities. We would like to have a site similar to what we have at the RAM that is also affordable. It may be necessary to hold the meetings on different nights of the week and not always on the same night each month. We will look at all the possibilities before making a final decision. If anyone can suggest a possible site for these monthly meetings, please contact me as soon as possible.

We are getting ready for the Christmas Bird Count for Edmonton, which will be held Sunday, December 19. Kim Blomme is organizing this, along with Geoff Holroyd. We need two zone captains for this event. The potluck for the CBC will be held

in the Strathcona Centre Community League at 10139 87 Avenue (entrance on 86 Avenue, phone number is 780-439-1501), as the John Janzen Nature Centre is closed for renovations.

The Edmonton Nature Club is sponsoring a raffle with proceeds going to the ENC. There are 500 tickets available at \$2 each. The raffle has been made possible because of the generous donation of a first prize of \$500 by Curtis and Michelle Manly and equally generous donations by the Wildbird General Store of a pair of binoculars worth \$300 as a second prize and \$200 toward a photograph by Gerald Romanchuk as a third prize. We thank Curtis and Michelle Manly and the Wildbird General Store and staff for arranging the raffle and for their contribution to the ENC. I would also like to thank the Wildbird General Store for advertising our monthly meetings at the RAM.

Finally, with the help of Bob Parsons we have arranged to have Trevor Herriot, a well-known author from Regina, to be the keynote speaker at our Annual Banquet, which will be held Saturday, March 26, 2011, at the Faculty Club on Saskatchewan Drive. Katie Calon will be organizing the banquet, and Barb Rowe will be in charge of ticket sales. Tickets will be limited, so purchase them early to avoid disappointment.

We are always in need of volunteers. We need someone who will look after the coffee and snacks for the monthly meetings, and we need a vice president for the club.

Respectfully submitted, **Ron Ramsey, President, ENC**

## 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**

EMAIL: [linda.sloan@edmonton.ca](mailto:linda.sloan@edmonton.ca)  
WEB: [www.lindasloan.com](http://www.lindasloan.com)

## Dr. Lu Carbyn Receives FAN's Loran Goulden Memorial Award

**The Loran Goulden Memorial Award is named for a respected Alberta naturalist, and is given annually by Nature Alberta for outstanding contributions to natural history in Alberta**

Dr. Lu Carbyn's research interests have included avian ecology, ecosystem biology (grasslands), and studies on mammals in several western and northern Canadian national parks. He became a biologist with the Canadian Wildlife Service in 1967, a research scientist in 1974, and has served on assignments in Poland and Portugal.

From 1989 to 1993, he headed the Canadian Swift Fox Reintroduction program as chairman of the Recovery Team. Dr. Carbyn is the Canadian member of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) Wolf Specialist Group and Canid Group, and is currently an Emeritus Research Scientist with the Canadian Wildlife Service in Edmonton, Alberta.

An adjunct professor with the University of Alberta, Dr. Carbyn works with graduate students. He is currently offering a course called **Wildlife-Human**

**Activities: Conflicts, Assessment and Mitigation**; the course gives University of Alberta students an appreciation of the issues and concerns in this province.

He has been invited to provide advice on wolves in the United States, Mexico, Poland, Italy and Portugal. As a consultant, he is involved with the conservation efforts in Nebraska of media magnate Ted Turner.

Ludwig Carbyn grew up in Namibia, in southern Africa. His forester father taught him many of the basics about nature. As a young boy, he spent hours sitting under a camel thorn tree watching the myriad birds around a local water hole.

"I wrote my first article for a wildlife journal when I was nine years old and I got a prize for it," he says. "It was for my observations of cattle egrets." His family moved to New Brunswick when he was 11 and he quickly became absorbed by the new temperate forests which were so different from the dry African savanna. Lu met a fascinating old trapper named Henry Fagan, who got Lu into a northern Canadian frame of mind. Fagan also taught the young Carbyn how to find and trap bobcats, mink and red

foxes – skills which would serve him well in years to come.

In the early '80s he was one of the driving forces behind the establishment of the Clifford E. Lee Wildlife Sanctuary near his acreage home.

Every year since 1985, he's travelled to Wood Buffalo Park to observe its wolves and bison. His research originally started as a government project, and he has continued for more than a decade at his own expense in order to provide continuity.



Photo: Jayne Carre

I first met Lu on a University of Saskatchewan course (trip) in Wood Buffalo National Park (WBNP), where he was teaching a number of interested individuals, as well as a National Park staffer and a CBC-TV film crew. He taught this further education course to naturalists in WBNP for several years, sharing what he knows about the wolves, bison, birds, ecology and ecosystems of WBNP.

He and his wife Jayne operate the Wildbird General Store in Edmonton, which gives him another venue for delivering his numerous wildlife educa-

tion projects, particularly to groups of small children, but also to Edmonton Nature Club members and many others. As a Nature Alberta Director, Lu is active with the Young Naturalists committee and has been a Board Member of the Edmonton Nature Club for many years.

He has spoken about his work with wolves and bison at a conference in Texas and he's been invited to be the guest speaker at the U.S. premier showing of an IMAX film on wolves. He helped David Suzuki film a *Nature of Things* (CBC) episode in Wood Buffalo Park in the mid '80s, but it was his work with BBC film makers that brought the wolves of the north to a huge audience.

Lu has spent much of his life educating folks about Alberta's wildlife and ecosystems, and is a most appropriate recipient of the Loran Goulden Memorial Award.

For a list of his publications, see:  
[www.wildbirdgeneralstore.com/carbyn/books.html](http://www.wildbirdgeneralstore.com/carbyn/books.html)

**Sandra Foss**

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## Snow Goose Chase 2010

The annual Snow Goose Chase was held on the third weekend of April. As we anticipated, the event was a success, despite the cold, dry conditions we have become accustomed to. Six buses of children from inner-city schools and agencies were booked solid, and the three buses for the paying public were sold out by the first week in April! All participants experienced local nature along with the customary spring migration of ducks, swans, geese, hawks, and other bird species. Some local natural-



*On the Snow Goose Bus Photo: Steve Knight*

ists were concerned about the very dry conditions and thought that the migrating Snow Geese might overfly the Beaverhill Lake/Ryley area or even move further east towards the Saskatchewan border. As it happened, the buses had to travel as far as Holden to find the thousands of Snow Geese north and south of the town. Many thanks must go to Jim Lange, Bob Gehlert, and others for their persistence and enthusiasm during the scouting period leading up to the Chase weekend.

This year we cannot mention frozen lakes and sloughs, as there was very little water to be found in them! The buses from Percy Page were able to stop at a couple of locations at the north end of Hastings Lake, and some excellent bird species were spotted – grebe, merganser, and Bald Eagle, as well as some light-coloured Red-tailed Hawks. Janos Kovacs, one of the scouts, thought there was “more variety of birds seen than last year at Hastings,” but I still think this year’s migration patterns were unsettled. The buses eventually made their way to the Tofield Community Hall, where their passengers viewed the various exhibits and enjoyed coffee and muffins compliments of Synergy and UMC Financial. We made a brief visit to Amisk Creek and Parsons Quarry to view the small numbers of migrating waterfowl, but, as expected, low water levels were again apparent and no rarities were spotted. The Great Horned Owl on

a nest made for great viewing, then it was off to the Legion for the usual gastronomic buffet luncheon!

After this break, it was back on the bus and off to look for the snowies that had been scouted out by Bob Gehlert and his team. The activity at the Ryley dump area was pretty well inaccessible, and it was only when the buses arrived in the Holden area that participants were able to view the thousands of geese north and south of the village. The ponds to the south of Holden were exceptional in that all five species of geese were mixed together, including Cackling Goose and Ross’s Goose. There were also good views of Red-tailed Hawk, Rough-legged Hawk, Swainson’s Hawk, and Northern Harrier. Passengers in most buses saw approximately 50 species, which is just below average for this event.

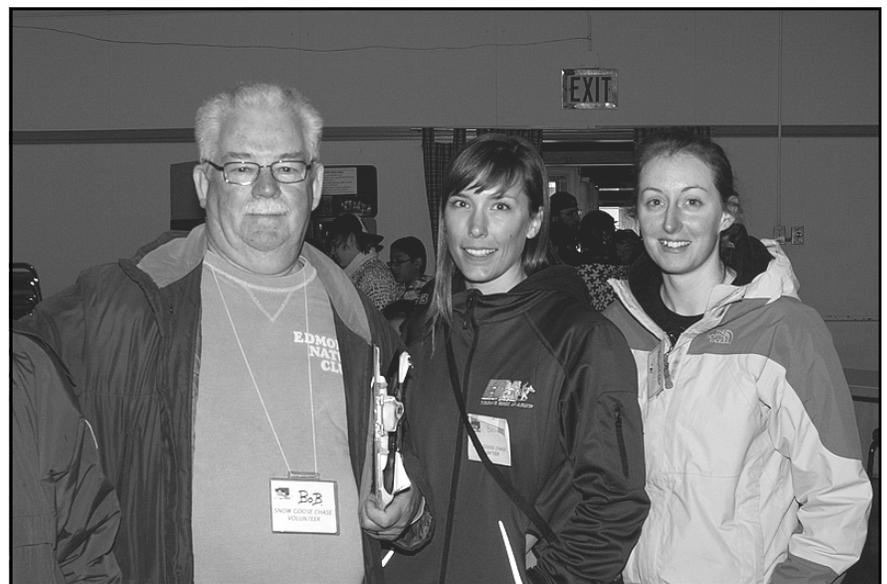
I would like to thank all the exhibitors for making the day so special, and a special thank-you must go to all the volunteers. We could not do this without you! As usual, the sponsors were generous in their support, and they play a huge part in making the Chase the event it is. Let us hope we can do it all again next year!

### Notes from the inner-city buses

Here are comments from some of the children and teachers who took part. I need say no more!

*Dear Mr. Bob Chase*

*Thanks for making the snow goose chase, I really had fun – here are some things I liked about it when we went to Tofield. 1) Hiked to the beaver dam and lodge. 2) Owls – saw a real barred owl who was blind. 3) Community centre we had a nice lunch, activities like the dipping pool, we saw the zoo guy with raptors. 4) The bus got stuck in the mud so played in the field. Watched a big machine*



*Bob, Brenda, and Mallory at the Tofield Community Hall*

(Hutterites) pull the bus out of the mud, we were playing tag while the bus was getting out of the mud then we saw snow geese flock in a pond and looked through binoculars at them. 5) Tofield museum was fun and it was all free. After we got to go around and look at some things, we got swag that means free things. At the museum we got to look at things that were really old like from the 1900, I might be wrong because I'm only guessing.

Thank you Bob Chase and everybody from Johnny T.

Dear Ms Bob Chase.

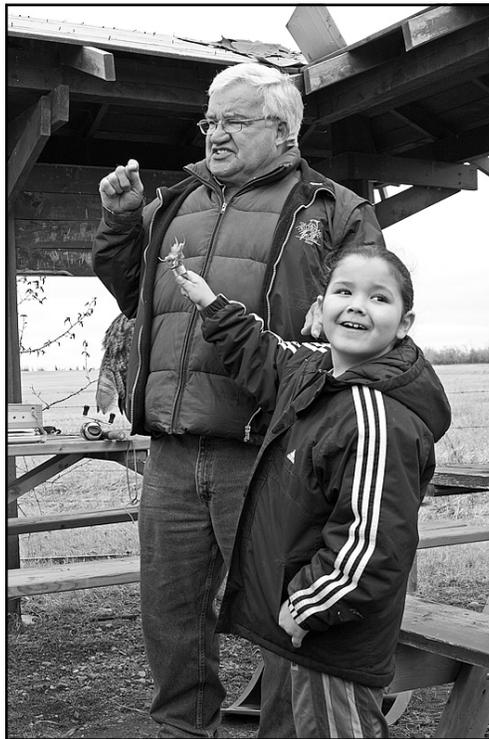
Thank you for the trip. First we went on a hike and saw 5 beaver dams and one real beaver. Next we went to Tofield town, went past and stopped in the middle of nowhere it was exciting we went for a bathroom break and we saw a real barred owl who was blind we got to pet him. Next we went to the Hall we had lunch there the lunch was hamburger but I pulled off my lettuce. What we also had was apple juice and had a choice of vegetarian and meat. You also get rice crispy chocolate or regular both with sprinkles. Then I went to see the owls then I saw the shrimp and one saltwater crab then a centipede there was a scorpion and a snake. Then I got to carve part of a duck then I got a pencil, sticker, magnet and there were whistles but Sarah got the last one. When we got on the bus we drove for a little then we got stuck in the mud. We made a straw fort then played tag and a bob cat came to get the bus. Finally we saw snow geese there I think 140 of them. Then we looked through telescopes, got back on the bus and went home! Thanks for this wonderful day it was awesome!

From Nakomis.

To our Wonderful Snow Goose Chase Sponsors!

My name is Julie Mouris, and I am Program Coordinator for the Inner City Children's Program here in Edmonton.

When I asked many of the kids if they had ever travelled around Alberta, many of them said no. A significant proportion of the children we work with are immigrants and refugees. Although they have come from elsewhere, they do not always have the chance to go outside the city they now call home, to see the beauty that the rest of Alberta has to offer. Even for those families who have been here their whole lives, other barriers often stand in the way of travelling around the



Ray Cromie's owl-banding demonstration.

province for pleasure. Our children were ecstatic to have the chance to run around in a field, see animals in their natural habitat, and simply have fun with their friends on a full-day field trip.

Sincerely, Julie Mouris

Well readers, I think these letters pretty well say it all. Thanks go to all the volunteers who made the day so memorable for all those who took part. The Edmonton Nature Club will never forget your efforts and enthusiasm!

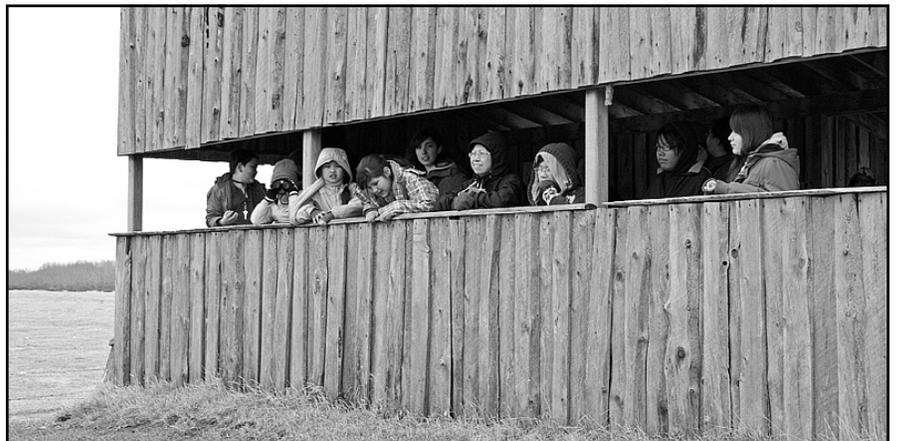
### Bob Parsons

Special Event Coordinator  
Edmonton Nature Club

### Snow Goose Chase Volunteers 2010:

Barb Rowe, Bob Gehlert, Paula Totton, Jocelyn Hudon, Kim Blomne, Kristen Peck, Lynn Chandler, Dolores Smithson, Lisa Szabo, Jaye Lee, Don Delaney, Treva Piekama, Lisa and Chuck Priestly, Lorele Will, Lele Chen, Zane Hamm and Roderick, Robyn Zink, Susan Chaudoir, Mike Benusic, Becky Mercer, Chris Sargeant, Larissa Shamseer, Morvyn Patterson, Andrew Forrest, Adam Blake, Nickolas Romaniuk, Gerald Romanchuk, Linda Zimmerling, Steve Knight, Stan Gosche, Jim Lange, Ray Cromie, Mike Jenkins, Ken Hansen, Karin and Marvin Tully, Virginia Witwicki, Toby-Anne Reimer, Mallory Jackson, Agnes Mitchell, April Zembal, Dee and Lynn, John Moore, Sarah Leo, Dale Dawson, Heather Ronnes, Brian Stephens, Brenda Shaughnessy, Lance Stenke, Jean Chapman, Stacey Hunt, Linda Charest, Sharon Ranson, Bob Parsons, Fred Martin, Janos Kovacs, Nancy Hernandez-Ceron, Florence Lukmito, Jiajie Wu, Beaverhill Lake Nature Centre staff.

Sincere apologies to anyone overlooked.



Looking out of the Francis Point bird blind.

## Snow Goose Chase 2010

### Beyond the City Limits

I got involved in this event after a friend invited me to come help volunteer. The inner-city kids, she said, rarely got out beyond city limits and I personally could empathize. Having come from rural Alberta and now living in Edmonton, I found I too rarely got beyond city limits anymore.

I was partly being selfish and partly altruistic in accepting the challenge; the goal was to get away from the droning hum of an urban organism. Even in the quietest hours, the city still rattles and wails as any properly industrious civilization should, I suppose. The added reward for seeking at least more naturally noisy surroundings was getting to share it with kids who knew exactly how to be rambunctious in this wilder space. I haven't regretted my choice and the balance of my motivations remains pretty much unchanged since the first year.

I've yet to be let down by the kids in terms of inquisitiveness and excitement or the snow geese who make their presence known each year just when one kid urgently realizes they need a washroom break. Anyway, I thought this year the flocking sandhill cranes really showed nature's beauty in motion; flights upon flights of birds just knowing where to go and going there...an amazing articulation. My thanks to organizers, sponsors, and supporters like the Town of Tofield, the Edmonton Nature Club, and Enbridge for giving us an opportunity to get beyond the city limits, it is always fun.

**Lance Steinke, MSc candidate  
University of Alberta**

### Chasing the Snow Goose

Saturday's weather for the 2010 Snow Goose Chase was a bit chilly, but I've seen worse conditions for this event, or for that matter, on the Snow Goose Festival. With such a dry winter and spring, birds and birders alike found it difficult to locate any water at all. Most creeks, ponds, and sloughs were dried up, and mere remnants of their former wetland wonder. The ponds south of Holden were an exception, providing a perfect stopover location for Canada, Snow, Ross's, and White-fronted Geese, plus a few ducks, and cormorants for good measure.

My task, for the morning, was to scout birds along Secondary 626, and back roads northeast of Holden then over to Tofield. I didn't see much along the roads I checked.

Even the Amisk Creek Bridge wetland area amounted to only muddy pools, with a scattered few bird species hardly making any sounds. Not at all like wetter years when it was dynamic with birds flying about, singing and calling. On this day, a few Killdeer, Marbled Godwits, Red-winged Blackbirds, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, and Western Meadowlarks made their presence known. One group of birders briefly stopped at the bridge; a father and his two sons, and we quickly went over the 14 species I had listed. I then joined other volunteers and bus tour participants for lunch at the Tofield Legion Hall. That noon

stop provides a chance to compare notes with the other birders and visitors.

I teamed up with a convoy of cars and two buses for one of the afternoon road trips. The buses carried children from Edmonton's inner city, who had already been to a few birding stops, like Hastings Lake, in the morning. We drove to a few more locations southeast of Tofield looking for reported owls,

then over to Holden, where experienced spotters had found the gathering of geese. Even though birds were hard to come by, the kids marveled at the springtime sights which I take for granted; like Mallards, a view through a spotting scope, an odd rock, or coyote poop. I always enjoy these events, especially when providing bird viewing opportunities for children who seldom get the chance to venture into the countryside, to see the natural world.

When the buses took off back to Tofield, then Edmonton, I stayed to talk with Neil Lennie, who had been manning the Holden location that day. We scanned the resting flocks of various geese, and found about 30 Ross's Geese. Within a few minutes, a car drove up, and out stepped three people; a young girl, her father, and her grandfather. They all had digital cameras and immediately set to work getting fantastic shots of the birds. Their birding and photo day had started in St. Albert. The young girl's father told me, "She keeps getting the best photos." At one point she told me proudly, "We've seen 33 hawks today." Now there's a family that knows how to document their birding day, in triplicate.

My personal bird count for the day was 42 species, with a low tally of 1,775 individuals. Other highlights were: Northern Harrier – 3, Red-tailed Hawk – 10, Rough-legged Hawk – 6, Merlin – 2, Swainson's Hawk – 2, American Kestrel – 2, ten species of ducks, and plenty of Robins.

**Robert B. Hughes**



*Lance at Ministik Lake*

## Snow Goose Chase Sponsors and Supporters

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 Grandin Prescription Centre, St. Albert  
 Safeway, St. Albert  
 Shoppers Drug Mart, St. Albert  
 Roy Financial, St. Albert  
 McBain Camera  
 The Valley Zoo

## Conservation Corner

### A Volunteer Opportunity with the North Saskatchewan River Valley Society

These days naturalists must also be conservationists. For some time now the North Saskatchewan River Valley Society (NSRVS) has been requesting that the Edmonton Nature Club send a representative to sit on its executive.

The NSRVS was formed in the spring of 2008, originally in response to the threat of development of gravel pits in the river valley in Edmonton's southwest. (That threat still exists, although the original company has since pulled out, to be replaced by another company.) The NSRVS has since expanded its scope to encompass a much wider mandate, that of engaging in activities to "conserve in perpetuity, for the purposes of public enjoyment, education, scientific research and the maintenance of biodiversity, environmentally, ecologically, historically and archeologically significant natural areas in the North Saskatchewan River Valley within the City of Edmonton." Its objects (paraphrased) are:

- to encourage a sound ecological and integrated watershed approach to land use and promote land use planning and decision-making that considers impact on wetlands and other hydrological and ecological features within the North Saskatchewan River Valley
- to research and share information with the public about the natural value of the North Saskatchewan River Valley
- to engage in analysis of regulations and policies relating to land use, development applications, project reviews and environmental protection

to secure non-public lands under conservation trusts or easements by working with existing land owners, government bodies and other entities, including local and regional land trust organizations

to actively raise monies to support conservation initiatives in the North Saskatchewan River Valley and work with other groups having similar interests and mandates.

As you can see, some of these activities dovetail with the Club's own, and we can certainly support in principle all of their objectives.

The Society has clearly set itself a huge task for the foreseeable future, but it has some excellent human resources and I'm guessing that it has also been able to amass some significant funding. Nevertheless, it would like to have someone with natural history expertise to advise it. I am informed that anyone becoming a member (membership is free) and attending board meetings would not find it too onerous a proposition. (Although hopefully an ENC member would be willing to provide regular reports to the Club to keep us up to date on NSRVS' activities and to let us know if any extra expertise was required.)

If you are interested, please contact me, Patsy Cotterill, at 780-481-1525, or email [nutmeg@planet.eon.net](mailto:nutmeg@planet.eon.net) and I'll pass on the Society's contact information to you. Something to think about for the New Year!

**Patsy Cotterill**

## The Day I Became a Birder and Joined the Club

Jack, my husband, wanted to join the Edmonton Nature Club. He had always been interested in birds, he was raised in the Fraser Valley, his parents loved nature, and his dad even wrote a column on birds in a small local paper.

Our marriage had been blessed with seven precious children who now had all flown the coop, and we were empty nesters. Dr. Benjamin Spock's books had been replaced by Sibley's. All sorts of other birding books and binoculars had permanent spots on the kitchen table. Our huge family grocery bills had been replaced by equally huge birdseed bills (no pun intended). My father-in-law had been a member of the Vancouver Nature Club, and Jack felt it was now time for us to join a local group.

I, however, am a bit shy, and after years of chasing after kids and monitoring their every activity, I wasn't so sure that I wanted to start doing the same with birds. Joining a club with all sorts of knowledgeable types, I also wasn't so sure about. Would we fit in? Would everyone or even anyone like us? I hardly knew anything about birds, but I was willing to give it a try because we had met Peter Demulder a few times when he was doing the Christmas Bird Count. Peter was friendly, he could speak Dutch and so could we, our last names both started with De (wow, maybe we were even family?). Peter knew a ton about birds and yet could talk to beginner birders like me. So, on the basis of meeting Peter Demulder I agreed to consider joining the club.



Pauline and Jack Dehaas Photo:P.Dehaas

Our first nature club meeting was in a classroom setting at NAIT, and the topic was comparing Tundra and Trumpeter Swans. Peter Demulder was there, was very welcoming, and invited us to sit near him, a gesture I really appreciated. The speaker had brought in a stuffed example of each swan. Jack was soon finding it all very interesting, whereas I was just looking around

wondering if we were going to fit in. After a while, I started to relax and listen to the speaker and even thought of a question. I asked, "What does a swan sound like?" Instantly, there erupted the most incredibly loud and clear Trumpeter Swan call, and it was so close and so unexpected that it probably cut ten years off my life...and it was coming from Peter! When my heart rate returned a bit to normal, I said to him, "Do you do that often?" and he

said, "Only when I'm asked," and I said, "Do it again," and he did. I am sure he could produce that sound better than the swan could. In fact, it was so real that I actually peeked under his chair to see if perhaps he'd birthed a little swan right then and there!

The rest of the club just smiled and continued on, as they had obviously heard Peter honk before – but for me, I didn't hear another word

that the speaker said. I kept thinking of this talent beside me. How did he learn to do that? Was there such a thing as "Swan Singing School"?



Pauline and Jack Dehaas Photo:G.VanderHorst

Was he

married? Did he practise in front of his wife, and did she say, "Now, Peter, I think you should be a half octave lower and stretch your neck a bit." Were swans Peter's favourite bird? Did everyone in the club have a favourite bird, and were they required to mimic the sound of it...like the big guy over there, what if he loved hummingbirds? Could he flap his arms and make hummingbird noises? And that tiny British-looking lady over there, she looks like a perfect little Saw-whet Owl!

So, while Jack was taking in the whole talk on the miracles of migrating and mating, molting and morphing, I just sat there worrying about what kind of bird I'd have to be. I just knew our kids would insist that having delivered seven of them, I would be a perfect stork. How could I find out what a stork sounded like?

The next meeting was at the Provincial Museum and the topic was "Turkey Vultures." I was all enthusiastic to go, as I was dying to see who in the audience would pop up gobbling! The meetings at the museum start with coffee in the foyer. We were just standing there when Percy Zalasky and Alan Hingston came up and kindly introduced themselves. Jack told them, "I have two American Goldfinches and a White-throated Sparrow at my place." Now because it was winter and these birds normally fly south, this was an unusual claim. So when Jack reported it to them, I could see Percy and Alan looking intently at my man and doing a sort of visual MRI, and I could just see them thinking, "Is there birdy knowledge in that brain? Could this be true? It would look pretty good on our monthly list!"

The very next day, who should arrive but Percy and Alan, and, sure enough, they saw the rare little sparrow and it

indeed was the White-throated – hurrah for Jack. I was proud! The next day, Dan Stoker was also along. I saw them in the backyard and announced to Jack, “Honey, the three wise men have arrived!” That day they missed the sparrow, but together they saw the goldfinches, which aren’t gold in winter, and a little tricky to identify in an area where they shouldn’t be wintering, but again Jack had it right and I was very proud!!

Well, a few days later, it was my turn: the day I would feel like maybe I could be a birder. I came home from shopping and birder Dan was in the yard. “Have you seen my husband’s little sparrow yet?” I asked. “No,” said Dan, “and I’ve been here three times looking and looking for it.” “Oh, it’s right there,” I said, waving my hand toward the hedge, not even looking that way (instead I was admiring his jacket, thinking, “If we join, I’ll get to buy gortex!”) “No,” Dan said patiently as he looked through his binoculars, “those are juncos.” Again not even glancing towards the hedge (I didn’t need to, by this time I knew the habits

of that little bird), I answered, “Yes, of course, the juncos. The little sparrow you are looking for is beside them on the right!”

And you know what...he was there! And of course he was there! He’d been there 99% of the time, all winter, only playing hide-and-seek when birders came looking. Anyways, Dan was very happy and impressed, and, truth be told, I was very happy, as I felt I’d impressed one of the wise men and even more, I was so extremely proud of that little sparrow for being in exactly the right place at the right time! It was just like a happy-parenting moment! Kids can sometimes make their parents look like inept idiots, but much more often they do exactly the right thing at the right time and fill us with pride and joy.

That crazy little bird did that for me...I felt like its mother!!! And that’s when I decided that sure, we could join the nature club and fit right in!!

**Pauline Dehaas**

## Conservation Corner – The New Alberta Parks Act, 2010

Most of you will have seen the publicity surrounding the introduction of the proposed new Alberta Parks Act (Bill 29) in early November, and some of you will have already contacted your politicians to express concern over the explicit deficiencies of this new Act – congratulations! The ENC has also officially added its voice to the chorus of dissent.

Briefly, the new Act would consolidate three existing parks Acts into a single Act and reduce the number of park classifications from seven to only two – Provincial Parks and Heritage Rangelands. Within the Provincial Parks uses and activities permitted on those lands would be indicated by zones, which in turn would be defined by regulations. The idea is that a Provincial Park would have different areas zoned for different purposes, from recreation to conservation. These zones and regulations are not dictated in the Act and will be worked out gradually over time, with the current legislation remaining in effect until the new zones and regulations come on stream.

Conservation groups, ENGOs, environmental lawyers and parks experts have panned the Act as seriously compromising the government’s ability to protect environmental integrity. It does away with the legislated protection enshrined in the current legislation for Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Wildland Parks, and Natural Areas. The danger is that zoning and regulation can be too readily changed at the discretion of the Minister (currently the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation), with public notification but with no requirement for public consultation. The stated intent of the Act is to maintain ecological integrity and conservation while providing op-



portunities for recreation and tourism, but given that the Act clearly weakens protection, it would appear that the real purpose of the Act is to provide the government with the flexibility it needs in order to exploit opportunities, including possibly industrial ones, that would generate revenue. In other words, the Act is a *carte blanche*, allowing the government to do what it likes.

Given the public outcry, the provincial government has now agreed to withdraw the Act for the time being, pending further review and public consultation. This development is eerily reminiscent of the situation that obtained

about a decade ago, when the government similarly tried to introduce consolidating legislation for parks, but the proposed legislation got lost in a welter of opposition, confusion, and contrary views.

This time, however, I do not think the new Act is going to go away. We have won a temporary reprieve on it, but we cannot afford

to forget about it. The lawyers will have input into the re-drafting, but we naturalists need to keep track of the zoning and regulations in order to determine what their consequences are, and be ready to contact our elected representatives if we discover deficiencies. Democracy requires constant vigilance.

To read the Act go to [http://www.assembly.ab.ca/net/index.aspx?p=bills\\_home](http://www.assembly.ab.ca/net/index.aspx?p=bills_home) and scroll down to Bill 29. To learn more about what the Sierra Club of Canada and CPAWS (the two groups who have campaigned most actively against the bill) are saying, check out their respective websites. Stay tuned!

**Patsy Cotterill**

## Hardy (Ehrhard) Pletz – The Birds of Prey Man

A Maryland school teacher started it all in the 1880s by asking people to send in their first spring sightings of migratory birds. It was a great idea, a way non-professionals could contribute to our knowledge about the world around us. That was called co-operation then; now it is called “citizen science.”

Today, we have many citizen science projects. One of the most famous is the breeding bird survey, an annual spring ritual for many dedicated birders. This continent-wide effort is jointly supported by the Canadian and US governments. Closer to home, a well-known Alberta project is Elisabeth Beaubien’s excellent spring flowering phenology study, which is of huge importance in monitoring the effects of climate change on plants. Other forms of citizen science involve species-specific projects or activities such as bird banding. In these areas, an outstanding example of a citizen-scientist is Ehrhard Pletz, known by most as Hardy, a quick-witted, strong-willed Edmonton retiree.

Hardy came to Canada from his native Germany in 1949. He moved about Alberta on different jobs, but it was as a truck driver that he became interested in what he saw around him – various kinds of birds. He got in touch with Cam Finlay, who encouraged him to start banding them. Hardy did that from 1975 to 1982 under the permit system issued to Cam. Later, working on his own, he has banded approximately 90,000 birds, specializing in raptors, particularly Great Horned and Snowy Owls.

Hardy has boundless energy and is very organized, and his dedication and hard work in the field have paid off. Some of his results are unique. No one in Alberta has, for example, seen as much as he has about the interaction of Great Horned Owls and Red-tailed Hawks during the nesting season.

As year-round residents, Great Horned Owls get a head start, occasionally nesting as early as the 6<sup>th</sup> of January. Owls do not build their own nests – they take them over from others. Red-tailed Hawk nests suit them just fine. Upon their return in late March or early April, the hawks often find their previous nests already occupied by owls. During 27 years of observation, Hardy has seen this happen many times. On several occasions the hawks simply gave up and started a new nest, sometimes a mere 30 metres or so from that of the owls. Often, it appears, the hawks won the standoff, probably destroying the young owls by tumbling them from the nest. At least once, Hardy saw them destroying the owls’ eggs.

Such observations simply are not possible during short-

term research projects carried out by university graduate students. People with a citizen science background are more hands-on and directly involved over longer periods of time. Individuals with a long-term association with a particular project, applying dedication and commitment to their work, often are able to obtain deeper insights into the relationships between and among species. Their challenge, however, is not only to do the work, but also to record and disseminate their findings. Amateur naturalists sometimes accomplish this task by working with others. Hardy recently collaborated with Gerry Beyersbergen in writing up some of his material.

Interaction between biologists and amateurs can be exceedingly effective in advancing science and conservation. This was apparent at a recent get-together of hawk and owl specialists in Edmonton. The topic

was the aging of birds of prey. Working alongside biologists such as Gordon Court, Hardy Pletz and other amateur ornithologists offered hard data and insights that contributed greatly to the discussions.

Co-operative efforts have been useful in expanding the knowledge base about our natural world, providing vital information that may have not only practical applications, but socially redeeming values as well. Certainly, it would be worthwhile for governments at all levels to encourage amateur involvement in conservation.

On numerous occasions, Hardy has participated in the release of rehabilitated owls and hawks. Such releases have made front-page news and help to spread the word about protecting our environment. It is important that young people be inspired to walk in the footsteps of mentors who care about the natural world. Hardy and other citizen-scientists have shown the way, and we are grateful for their leadership.



*Hardy with a Snowy Owl Photo: Lu Carbyn*



*Hardy with Gordon Court and Peter Pyle*

**Lu Carbyn**

## Northern Mockingbirds Nest in Edmonton

On August 20, I got an interesting call from Dick Dekker. He and his wife Irma had just returned from a three-week peregrine study in the Bay of Fundy, and to their surprise, an unfamiliar bird had taken possession of their back yard. A check of the field guides proved it to be a Northern Mockingbird. The bird wasn't shy and flew in and out of the yard, collecting beak-fulls of bugs, which were packed away across the fence into a neighbour's yard.

When I went over that evening to check it out, the first thing I saw was the mocker perched on a deer antler attached to what the Dekkers call their totem pole. So, I got a photo before I rang the bell!

Earlier that afternoon, Dick had seen two mockers. They proved to be very aggressive, furiously chasing magpies and blue jays. To add to the excitement, a Merlin, swooping in over the roof of the house, twice made a pass at a mocker, which escaped into a bush.



*Mockingbird with Chokecherries*

the birds alone, but I posted the sighting on the internet message board, *Albertabird*, that evening. We decided to keep the location quiet until the young had fledged.

On September 9, Dick phoned to say that he had seen two chicks hopping around in the neighbour's yard. He added with some concern that he had seen only one of the adults for the last few days, and that the magpies had been seriously harassing and attacking the lone adult mocker. The next day, after the mocker/magpie hostilities had subsided and the young mockers were being fed regularly, Dick thought it would be okay to post the birds' location.

One of the first people to follow up on the posting was Doug Faulder. On September 10, while talking with Dick, he mentioned that he was familiar with the species from Arizona, and that he had just spotted both adults a little distance apart in the back lane of

112A Street. This was welcome news. Apparently the pair had separated so each could follow and feed one or more fledged youngsters.

Since then, a number of people have taken advantage of the opportunity to add this local rarity to their life



*A full load of bugs!*

lists. The mockers were not difficult to find and habitually perched high on tree tops, looking for insects. During the very cold and rainy weather of early September, it was reassuring to see that this southern species had little trouble finding food. Apart from berries, bugs, spiders, and dragonflies, they caught worms. A full load wriggling in their beaks, the adults perched on overhead wires to scout out the surroundings before sneaking off to a well-hidden youngster.

The last person to see the family was Irma Dekker, who watched both adults and two chicks scurrying about in her back yard on September 19. The next day, Dick had a brief glimpse of one adult. Since then, although he has searched the neighbourhood several times, both adults and young have disappeared. On September 27, Irma had a look at the nest, kind of a flimsy set-up, built with small branches, 2 metres up in the crab apple tree.

Considering that these birds nested successfully, there is a chance that they might be back next year.

Northern Mockingbirds have been seen in Edmonton before. I'm aware of a handful of sightings over the past ten years (there may be others from earlier). Joanne McFarland, in Clareview, had a mocker spend most of the winter of 2002/2003 in her back yard. Stan Gosche photographed one in his yard in West Edmonton in August of 2003. Another one spent some time in a northeast neighbourhood in December of

2004 before being taken to the Wildlife Rehabilitation Society. As far as I'm aware, this was the first time they've been recorded nesting in our city.

**Gerald Romanchuk**



*Mockingbird fledgling*

## Birding Highlights at Cooking Lake in 2009 and 2010

It is ironic that a decade of drought which wiped Beaverhills Lake totally off the map has led to greatly improved opportunities for birdwatching at Cooking Lake.

In past years, few local birders checked out Cooking Lake, although it is conveniently located within view of highway 14 and on the way to Beaverhills Lake. I only stopped off at Cooking during freeze-up time when the last of the ducks crowded together in a few waterholes. Most of them were probably cripples, victims of the shooting season or lead poisoning. One or more Bald Eagles could usually be seen standing on the ice nearby, and with patience there was a chance to watch them trying to capture one of the splashing and diving ducks. However, during spring and summer I seldom visited Cooking Lake because a wide belt of bulrush and cattails obstructed the view of the water, and shorebirds were scarce due to the absence of mudflat habitat.

My very last day trip to Beaverhills Lake, after 45 years of frequent visits every spring and fall, was May 16, 2009 (See "The Ten Last Years of Birding at Beaverhills Lake," *Nature Alberta*, Spring 2010). After that pivotal date, when the remnant pool of shallows had all but completely dried up, I switched over to Cooking Lake. In 2009, I made a total of 16 visits: two each per month in May, June, July, August, and October, and six visits in September. Here too, the water levels had been dropping, leaving vast mudflats, but opening up the shoreline for easy access. At each visit I walked a 4-5 km stretch of south shore, returning the same way. Sadly, most of the soft littoral zone was chewed up by ATVs, the modern-day curse of the countryside. Following are some of the birding highlights of 2009.

**May 25.** A great day, sunny with light winds and a high of 21° C. Unevenly spread along the shoreline, there were several thousands of migratory sandpipers, predominantly Semipalmated with about 5% other species, including Baird's, White-rumped, and Stilts. In addition, I counted



*Black-bellied Plovers*

about 80 Black-bellied Plovers and 3 Red Knots. Far out on the lake, the surface was dotted with Red-necked Phalaropes. They often flew up in dense formations,

alarmed by Peregrines. Once, there were two falcons simultaneously swooping down in pursuit of prey. One of them succeeded in making a catch and carried it along inland. In early evening, when I sat down on a stony point littered with soda-encrusted boulders, at least 27 Sabine's Gulls flew by. Some of these pretty gulls alighted on the water, and my telescope revealed the diagnostic yellow-tipped bill. Back home, I e-mailed this rare sighting to several local birders. A few days later, when Gerald Romanchuk visited the lake, he failed to see Sabine Gulls, but recorded an even rarer bird: a Snowy Plover. After he alerted his birding contacts, the little plover was subsequently located by a number of other people. Prior to that day, Gerald had several times checked out a shallow bay near the Cooking Lake airport and seen a good selection of waders as well as one or two Peregrines on most visits.



*Greater Yellowlegs*

**May 28.** There were not as many sandpipers as three days ago and they were spottily distributed. However, along one kilometre of muddy east shore, at an average of one bird per linear metre, I count-estimated 1000 peep. In addition, I saw at least 200 sandpipers along the next kilometre. The majority were again Semipalmated, with roughly 10% Sanderlings as well as a few Least and Baird's, and a single Stilt Sandpiper. Gulls seemed less numerous than before, with the majority being Franklin's and Ring-bills. Countless phalaropes were swimming far out on the lake, but I saw no sign of hunting falcons today. Among the waterfowl were quite a few Eared Grebes and Buffleheads.

**June and July.** On June 4, migrant shorebirds were gone except for two small flocks of peep. As to the locally breeding waders, Killdeer seemed scarce but Avocets were common. On June 26, a colony of about 30 included at least one large chick. And on July 8, I counted six juveniles. The highlight of June 26 was a Piping Plover. Its alarm behaviour betrayed that it might be nesting. On July 10, there were two protesting adults, and on July 28, I saw two nearly full-grown chicks scurrying about with a parent. On the same date, in the shallows around a stony islet, I counted approximately 400 Avocets, 50 Marbled Godwits, and 80 Hudsonian Godwits. Other migration arrivals on their way back from northern breeding grounds included a scattering of Lesser Yellowlegs, Black-bellied Plovers, and a few small flocks of peep. After a warm week, the shallow waters had receded farther out and the stench of rotting algae was overwhelming.

**August.** The shoreline was packed with thousands of loafing ducks. They flushed in alarm with a roar of wings well ahead of my approach. Several hundred Lesser Yellowlegs were less jumpy. Here and there, I walked by a couple of foraging Greater Yellowlegs, Marbled Godwits, and Willets. At one location, there were dozens of Long-billed Dowitchers and 24 Hudsonian Godwits. Sandpipers were generally scarce. Those close enough for identification turned out to be Pectorals and Semipalmated, with the odd Baird's or Least, and a single Stilt. Scanning the deeper water well off-shore through binoculars, I discovered hundreds of Red-necked Phalaropes. Gulls were also numerous: mostly Franklin's, Bonaparte's, and Ring-billed, with the odd Herring Gull.



*Bonaparte's Gull*

**September.** I visited the lake on six dates. On September 6, several flocks of White-fronted Geese passed by, totaling about 800 birds, and dozens of Water Pipits twittered along the shore. The highlight of the month was a Para-

sitic Jaeger. Scanning the lake, I had picked it up far away. When it went down on the water, I kept it in focus of the binoculars. Some ten minutes later, it flew up again and approached closely to harass a Ring-billed Gull, giving me a perfect view of the jaeger's diagnostic tail.



*American Avocets*

Shorebirds became progressively scarcer but still included a fair variety. Apart from a few peep, I came across 30 Sanderlings and 12 Black-bellied Plovers, as well as some species I had not recorded before at this lake, such as one Golden Plover, one Ruddy Turnstone, and two Buff-breasted Sandpipers. Avocets remained locally common until the end of the month, with 300 still present on October 1. On the 17<sup>th</sup>, my last visit of the year, the only waterbirds seen were ducks.

**Spring 2010.** Compared to the previous year, shorebird migrations in April and May of 2010 were a disappointment. Based on my long experience at Beaverhills Lake, huge differences may occur from year to year, perhaps depending on continental weather patterns, which may force migrants to bypass Alberta and travel through Saskatchewan instead. Our weather was generally cold and windy. There was no snow melt run-off and lake levels were about as low as in the fall of 2009, despite several good spring rains.

My first visit of April 23 seemed promising. Walking the same stretch of south shore as last year, I saw about 50 each of Avocets and Lesser Yellowlegs in addition to one Hudsonian Godwit and one Killdeer. The surprise was two Black-necked Stilts, my first sighting of this species at Cooking Lake. Three days later, the stilts were gone and the number of yellowlegs was reduced to three. But the avocets had doubled their number and I counted 6 Hudsonian Godwits.

Between May 1 and 26, I visited the lake on ten days, usually in the afternoon. During a warm spell in the second week, millions of chironomids (lake flies) rose like a smoke screen over the shore. Their larvae (blood worms)

## Birding Highlights at Cooking Lake (continued)

provided the shorebirds with plenty of food, and the sky was full of screaming Franklin's Gulls hawking the midges.

On the 10<sup>th</sup>, there were about 80 dowitchers and the odd Willet probing the shallows. The first small flocks of peep



*Hudsonian Godwit*

showed up on May 14, when the weather turned very cold. In ensuing days, the largest flocks I saw contained no more than one or two hundred birds, mostly Semipalmated Sandpipers and a few Baird's. Stilt Sandpipers occurred in similarly modest numbers. On May 17, checking out the bay near the airport, Gerald Romanchuk reported the longest list of species so far, including one each of Whimbrel, Black-bellied Plover, Red Knot, and Sanderling.

Wind direction appeared to play a major role in concentrating the shorebirds. On May 19 and 22, with cold northwesterlies blowing, I saw no sandpipers at all along my 4–5 km walk, but the upwind airport bay contained about 300 peeps and stilts, as well as 30 Black-bellied Plovers, 2 Red Knots, and 1 Turnstone. After a day of rain, the temperature dropped to just above freezing. Hundreds if not thousands of swallows and Purple Martins were cruising low over the lake, picking up insects from the surface. By contrast, on May 24 and 26 when the wind blew strongly from the southeast, I saw not a single migrant shorebird in the airport bay, but there were several hundred sandpipers and about 30 plovers on the east side of the lake. Red-necked Phalaropes were similarly affected by wind direction. Although they never reached the very large aggregations of the previous spring, between May 16 to 26, a few flocks could be seen on the water well off-shore.

**Summer and Fall 2010.** As of mid-September, this year has already turned out to be wetter than the 30-year annual average for central Alberta. But despite frequent

rains between April and August, Cooking Lake went down. In the spring, I had placed a marker stone at the water line. By mid September, the lake level had dropped about 20 cm. This confirms something I learned at Beaverhills Lake: summer evaporation greatly exceeds rainfall. For this reason, it is vitally important that inflowing streams should not be dammed.

Walking my familiar route up the southeast shore and back the same way, I visited the lake on 12 dates: two in June, three in July, two in August, and five in September. In June there were thousands of loafing ducks, flushing with a roar of wings a long ways ahead of my approach. Billions of lake flies provided a feast for thousands of Franklin's Gulls. But except for the odd Killdeer and Spotted Sandpiper, I saw no evidence of nesting shorebirds. Up to one hundred Avocets were just idling. Their numbers varied over summer, until they suddenly increased to several thousand on September 23.

Shorebird migrations were below last year. Dowitchers, Pectorals, and Sanderling were spread widely but never numerous. The best day was August 26, with some 300 Lesser Yellowlegs, 200 Pectorals, and the odd Semipalmated, Least, and Baird's Sandpipers, in addition to three Ruddy Turnstones. After the frosty nights of mid September, shorebird numbers were even scarcer, with here and there a few dozen Dowitchers and the odd small flock of peep. One or two Golden Plovers hung around with a hundred or so Black-bellied Plovers until September 23.



*Sanderling*

Being a falcon aficionado, my highlight of the fall was seeing an adult male Peregrine climb high over the lake to intercept a magpie. Pursuing it on a downward course back to land, the falcon had time for three or four swoops before the dodging target dropped into the bushes. This is the first time ever that I see a Peregrine hunt the wily magpie.

**Dick Dekker**

## Field Trip Reports

### Jackie Parker Park – May 6, 2010

Four of us explored the lake at Jackie Parker Park (50 Street and Whitemud Drive) in the evening. The lake has large numbers of Red-winged Blackbirds and currently many Franklin's Gulls.



*Hermit Thrush*

We also explored the wooded areas along the creek to the west and south. The early part of the evening around the lake seemed to have few passerines, but we found a good variety in the later part of the evening along the creek. Highlights in the woods were Orange-crowned Warbler (very good look) and Hermit Thrush (song).

Species for the day: 26

**Brian Stephens**

### Beaverhill and Tofield Area – May 8, 2010

Eight of us visited the BBO in the morning and areas near Tofield, finishing at Cooking Lake.

The BBO area was quite quiet but we did see an Alder Flycatcher, Yellow-rumped Warblers, Purple Finches, and nice views of Northern Harrier. Fourteen Ravens were playing over the grasslands of the old Beaverhill Lake bed. Greater White-fronted Geese and Sandhill Cranes passed over.

Amisk Creek, although gaining some depth after the recent rain, is still very low, with only small numbers of waterfowl. The area south of Tofield yielded a single Black-bellied Plover, small flocks of Least and Semipalmated Sandpipers, Willet, Marbled Godwit, American Avocet, and Lesser Yellowlegs.

The marsh behind the Nature Centre in Tofield had a Sora and Yellow-headed Blackbird. I believe there is a Virginia Rail calling from the marsh, based on call.

Cooking Lake had 50+ Avocets and small flocks of peeps along with waterfowl.

Number of Species: 52 (excluding Virginia Rail)

**Brian Stephens**

### Century Day at Elk Island – June 26, 2010

We held our annual "Century Day" at Elk Island National Park this past Saturday. Twenty-five members met at the park bright and early at 7 a.m. The morning was pretty damp – light rain until 10:30 or so. Things cleared off in the afternoon, and it got warm and breezy. The weather sure didn't make for productive birding – at least that's our excuse for coming up short of our goal of 100 species.

Despite the weather, we had a lot of fun and found 82 bird species as a group. Another 10 or so birds were found by individuals before we met or after we split up. No real unusual sightings, mostly birds we'd expect out there.

A couple of highlights were nice close views of birds such as Yellow Warbler and Rose-breasted Grosbeak – especially good for some of the newer birders. Others, including Mourning Warbler and Ovenbird, were heard only. Also had a great look at a Broad-winged Hawk being chased and harassed by a crow as it flew past the beach at Astotin Lake.

Should also report that Martin Sharp walked out to Tawayik Lake after the group split up and saw a few hundred shorebirds out on the mud flats.

**Gerald Romanchuk**

### St. Albert Songbirds – August 22, 2010

Fourteen members arrived at Lacombe Park about 9 a.m. on an overcast day, and



*Black-throated Green Warbler*

spent the next 3 hours working our way through the park. We did quite well on warblers: American Redstart, Cape May, Magnolia, Tennessee, and Yellow.

After lunch we moved over to the Spruce Lot, where we added Black and White, Black-throated Green, and Yellow-rumped. We finished off at Atim Creek hoping for shorebirds, but only a Wilson's Snipe was seen.

Species for the day: 60

**Brian Stephens**

## Field Trip Reports (continued)

### Cooking Lake – August 28, 2010

Eight of us arrived at the Aviation Centre on the North West side of Cooking Lake around 9:15 on a very cool, windy morning. We spotted an adult Bald Eagle and shortly after a juvenile Bald Eagle before tracking down modest flocks of shorebirds and large masses of molting ducks.

We spent about 3 hours walking the full loop around the spit before going over to Lakeview, where we met Gerald. We were alerted to a Peregrine by some birders just leaving the area. We were able to pick out both Long-billed and Short-billed Dowitchers and several Sanderling. The weather was definitely staying cool and rain showers were approaching, so we finished around 2:30.

**Brian Stephens**

### Elk Island – September 12, 2010

Sunday, in spite of forecasts, started cool, clear and calm. Ten of us explored the woodlands and lakes of Elk Island.

Highlights were Surf Scoter, Sandhill Cranes passing over, Bald Eagle, and 5 grebe species. By early afternoon rain clouds were approaching, so we called it a day with 57 species.

**Brian Stephens**



*Sandhill Cranes*

### Opal and Halfmoon Lake – October 3, 2010

Ten of us enjoyed the calm and comfortable weather exploring the Opal Natural area, which last spring was hit by a major fire. In the afternoon we contrasted this with the Halfmoon Lake Natural Area, which escaped most of the fire.

In the pine areas of Opal the fire burned the moss/lichen and small plants. Now many small bushes are growing (e.g., blueberry), giving a quite different feel to the area.



*Short-billed Dowitcher*

As would be expected, the burned area is much more open. We noted that the number of birds and species was greater in the Opal area (23) than in Halfmoon (4), but we also visited at different times of day.

In Opal a small group of bluebirds was seen. Among the Mountain Bluebirds, there was a single bird that was likely an Eastern Bluebird (female).

Like many others this weekend, we heard Sandhill Cranes through much of the day. In one location we were able to watch them cruise in a low altitude, hit a thermal and circle up, then launch off the upper thermal into another long glide.

In the late afternoon we moved up to TWP 590 to look for owls. We had done a grid pattern and returned to a spot we had already covered and were about to head home when we spotted a

Great Grey Owl just down the road. This kept the photographers busy and was a nice closer for the day.

Species for the day: 32

**Brian Stephens**

## Misty Ridge – October 16, 2010

Four of us joined our trip leader Jim Lange for a day of birding north of Barrhead at the Misty Ridge ski hill.

We had a few flocks of Tundra Swans on the way up near Westlock, then 2 Rough-legged Hawks closer to Misty Ridge.

At the ski hill, we saw a juvenile Golden Eagle zip across in front of us. Walking down the hill into the Athabasca River valley, we picked up Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Black-capped Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, Dark-eyed Junco, Robin, Raven, Magpie, Blue Jay, and 2 small flocks of Bohemian Waxwings.

Down along the river were 3 Bald Eagles near a moose carcass.

Unfortunately, weather conditions – a light SE wind – weren't good for raptor migration. We didn't see any for the 3 hours or so that we spent on top of the hill. Theory was that Friday's strong north wind had probably pushed a lot of birds right through.

Later in the afternoon, we drove up near the Vega Natural Area and spotted Tree Sparrow and an immature male Spruce Grouse. Then it was on to Jarvie for a fantastic fall

dinner at the community hall. The biggest problem of the day was fitting back into the vehicle after filling up on turkey and especially the home-made pie!

**Gerald Romanchuk**



*Hooded Merganser*

Hooded Merganser, and Tundra Swan.

In general, the birds do not seem to be concentrating in the cooling ponds yet. The Keephills pond was nearly deserted, while the bays on the lake had significant concentrations and variety.

Species for the day: 37, plus 1 very distant loon species.

**Brian Stephens**

## Editor's Message

Well, I guess I could say better late than never, but what I really need to do is apologize to everyone in the club. This issue is very, very late! First the spring, then the summer, and then the fall, all just flew by. I could make a long list of excuses, but I don't want to bore you.

For this issue we owe a huge debt to Judith Johnson for copy-editing and proof-reading. If she hadn't helped out, I'd still be struggling with commas and periods. Thank you very much, Judith!

Another round of thanks have to go to our regular contributors. Lu Carbyn, Patsy Cotterill, Jim Lange, and Bob Parsons all continue to provide excellent material. If these people didn't come through, like they always do, we wouldn't have much of a newsletter.

I also appreciate the submission of Bert and Bernie Yeudall's owl story and photos. Dawne Colwell and Steve Knight sent in some great photos. Ron Ramsey's "President's Message" and Brian Stephens' field trip reports (originally submitted to *Albertabird* and the club's website) are very welcome additions.

In addition to the above, we're treated to the work of a few new contributors this issue.

Lance Steinke has been volunteering on the Snow Goose Chase for the past few years and shares some of his thoughts on the chase.

Robert B. Hughes, a naturalist from Vegreville, has been helping out with the chase as well, and gives us another point of view on one of our club's most popular events.

Pauline Dehaas and her husband Jack live near St. Albert. Pauline did a reading of her story at a St. Albert nature Study Group meeting. I thought her writing would be perfect for the *Naturalist*.

It was great to receive material from Dick Dekker for this issue. Many readers are familiar with Dick, a well-known naturalist, author, and long-time wildlife researcher who was awarded a doctorate for his work on birds of prey.

Thanks again to everyone who helped with this issue!

**Gerald Romanchuk, Editor**

## Wabamum – November 6, 2010

Ten of us headed out to the Wabamum area on a good day – light wind, not too cold, not snowing or raining. We visited the townsite wharf, Provincial Park, Keephills cooling pond, the south shore bays, and the Seba Beach area.

Highlights: a lone American White Pelican at the wharf, 2 adult and 1 juvenile Bald Eagles, American Tree Sparrow,

## Wildbird General Store Bird Sightings Report



February to November 2010

### Raptors

**Prairie Falcon:** photographed at Callingwood Rd and Anthony Henday Dr. Feb. 23, and a second sighting near Amisk Cr. bridge Sept. 24, by Eric Wallace and Art Hughes. **Peregrine Falcon:** first sighted at Inland Cement Apr. 6 by

Fred Whiley, followed by numerous reports from South Cooking L. during spring and fall shorebird migration.

**Cooper's Hawk:** observed July 13 at Miquelon L. chasing Purple Martins at a nest site and trying to pull the adults or young out of the nest box. An imm. observed at Misty Ridge Oct. 12, harassing a couple of Ravens before drifting across the valley and down into the trees. **Red-tailed Hawk:** first reported east of Elk Island Park Mar. 26 by

Martin Sharp; 15 seen around Beaverhill L. Mar. 29 by Ed Mah-Lim. **Harlan's Hawk:** reported sitting in a tree along Hwy 18 just west of Rossington Sept. 19 by Jim Lange, and at 217 Ave. and 17 St. Oct. 11 by Marc Demers and Trevor Roper. **Swainson's Hawk:** first reported from Spruce Grove Apr. 18 by Curtis Manley, and at 99 St. and Whitemud Dr. Apr. 20 by Trevor Roper; first observed in the Beaverhill area during the Hawk Survey May 2, and at Clyde corner May 12 by Jim Lange and Vince Cottrell.

**Northern Harrier:** an early arrival seen at Misty Ridge Mar. 20 by Jim Lange and Fred Whiley, a female seen at Whitford L. Mar. 27 by Gerald Romanchuk, 1 seen near Black Nugget L. Oct. 21 by Eric Wallace and Art Hughes, and another flushed from the edge of Rge Rd 20 SW of Fawcett Oct. 31 by Jim Lange. **Rough-legged Hawk:** 20+ seen at Whitford L. near Andrew Mar. 27 by Gerald Ro-



*Osprey*

manchuk, and 1 at Misty Ridge on the Sept. 25 ENC field trip. Wide-spread throughout the region during Apr. and Oct. spring and fall migration. **Osprey:** 2 sightings at Beaverhill L. during the Hawk Survey this spring – the first just east of Francis Point May 30 by Heather Ronnes, Jim Lange, Lu Carbyn, and Ed Mah-Lim; the second (possibly the same bird) June 6, with the bird soaring high over the north end of Tofield and observed from the Nature Centre marsh. A first record for Misty Ridge was on the ENC field trip Sept. 25. **Turkey Vulture:** seen just west of Tofield

Apr. 20 by Randy Coombs, and from Bellis (Smokey L. area) Apr. 30 by Richard Klauke. A pair were observed immediately south of Wakomao L. June 12 during an ENC field trip, another pair were seen feeding on roadkill 20 km north of Calling L. June 20 by Av Mann, an imm. was observed at Wabamun L. Aug. 28 by Stu Arnold, another was seen in the Two Hills area Sept. 25 by Doug



*Rough-legged Hawk*

Faulder, and an unconfirmed report of 1 over the river valley in Edmonton Oct. 11. Av Mann reported a Turkey Vulture still at Calling L. Oct. 27 and indicated they had been in the area most of the summer. **Golden Eagle:** first report from Cory Ridge on the NE boundary of Edmonton Mar. 12 by Bob Popik. An imm. was seen at Misty Ridge Mar. 20 by Jim Lange and Fred Whiley, another over Edmonton Garrison Apr. 13 by Ted Hindmarch. Heather Ronnes spotted 1 at Cross L. May 1. An adult was observed soaring and climbing over Leyland Mtn. at Cadomin June 1 by Jim Lange, a pair of adults soaring low over Cadomin Mtn. were observed from the Prospect Cr. bridge Aug. 8 by Jim Lange and Linda Jarmolicz, 6 (adults and imm.) at Misty Ridge Oct. 10 and an adult on Oct. 12 were seen by Jim Lange, and an imm. was seen at Misty Ridge Oct. 16 ENC trip. **Bald Eagle:** adult seen along Hwy 11 east of Red Deer Feb. 28 by Dan Heinrichs, and an adult observed at the Misty Ridge nest site Feb. 9 and Mar. 4, although for unknown reasons (possibly due to the poor condition of the nest tree) the nest was not used – the first time in many years! A pair were seen along the N. Saskatchewan R. at Ft. Saskatchewan Mar. 8 by Brenda McLeod. On Mar. 28, Gerald sighted 10 in the Bittern L. area, while at Misty Ridge Jim Lange saw 22 on Mar. 30, 7 on Oct. 12, and 27 on Oct. 19. On Nov. 1, a new one-day high was achieved at Misty Ridge: 52 Bald Eagles, 4 Golden Eagles, 2 Goshawks, Harlan's Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, and several Rough-legged Hawks seen in 5.5 hrs. The previous high counts were 42 on Apr. 11, 2002, seen by Fred Whiley and Jim Lange, and 49 seen Oct. 23, 2003, during an ENC trip.

### Owls

**Snowy Owl:** very sporadic and difficult to find for most of the winter; 4 were seen Feb. 14 NW of St. Albert on the

ENC trip, another reported at the CN Walker Railway in north Edmonton the week of Feb. 7 by my former co-worker Joe Santos. **Note:** in the early 1980s they were seen frequently each winter at this location, occasionally 2 birds sitting on the shop roof at the same time! Eric Wallace and Art Hughes had several observations SE of Tofield and another near Black Nugget L. Mar. 5. There were 2 sightings of the same bird along Glen Park Rd south of Leduc Mar. 8 and 11 by Javen Green. Gerald Romanchuk observed 1 in the Cucumber L. area near Willingdon and 6 around the NW corner of Beaverhill L. Mar 27, and another at Whitford L. Apr. 12. **Great Gray Owl:** scarce this winter as well; I did not see any along the Cross L. road. The only sighting for the period was on Twp Rd 590 in the Opal area on Oct. 3 at the close of an ENC field trip to Opal and Half Moon L. Natural Areas. One was seen along Hwy 801, 14 km south of Cross L. Oct. 31 by Jim Lange. **Hawk Owls:** no reports. **Barred Owl:** first report from the south end of Mill Creek ravine Feb. 28 by Fred Whiley and Alf Scott, 1 heard calling at Cross L. Aug. 8 by Richard Palindent, 1 in Whitemud Ravine Oct. 8 reported by Pat Marklevitz. **Barred Owl and Pygmy Owl:** reported from 35 km NW of Blue Ridge Oct. 9 by Ray Cromie. Last sighting from McKinnon Ravine Oct. 29.

### Waterfowl

**Canada Geese:** first spring reports Mar. 5, heard flying over Antler L. and Hastings L. **Snow Geese:** not sticking around the Beaverhill L. area due to the lack of water; however, on Mar. 20 Ed Mah-Lim saw a flock of approx. 2000 and Ken Hansen saw a flock of approx. 1000 at Lyseng Reservoir at the same time. During the Snow Goose Chase at the end of Apr., the geese were concentrated in the area immediately south of Holden, allowing participants on all the buses to see them!



*Great Egret*

**Trumpeter Swans:** 2 seen in the Spruce Grove area Mar. 29 by Curtis Manley, and a pair at Bouchard L. east of Clyde May 29 seen by Jim Lange and Fred Whiley. Due to low water levels, they did not stay to nest as they did in 2007 and 2008. **Tundra Swan:** approx. 100 NW of Westlock Mar. 30 seen by Jim Lange, 500 on Slack Slough in Red Deer Apr. 5 seen by Walter Harris and Joan Miller, approx. 800 seen flying past Misty Ridge Apr. 6. The first fall migrants seen at the junction of Hwy 2 and Hwy 18, with 2 small flocks observed during the Oct. 16 ENC field trip. **Pintails:** approx. 600 seen flying through the Beaverhill L. area Mar. 29 by Ed Mah-Lim. **Eurasian Wigeon:** first report from Spruce Grove Mar. 29 by Curtis Manley, 1 seen near Dodds Apr. 4 by Ken Hansen, at Cucumber L. Apr. 12 by Gerald Romanchuk, at Lyseng Reservoir Apr. 18 by Fred Whiley, and at Hastings/Cooking L. ENC field trip Apr. 18. **Wood Duck:** male observed at Limestone L. Apr.

24 by Gerald Romanchuk, and a second male seen at Hawrelak Park Oct. 27 by Jaye Lee. **Harlequin Duck:** male seen on N. Saskatchewan R. at Gold Bar May 2 by Peter Haddock. **Hooded Merganser:** a pair seen at the bridge in Cross L. May 12 and again on the June 12 ENC field trip by Jim Lange, 3 males and 10 females seen on Beaumaris L. Sept. 30 by Don Delaney, and 17 seen on



*Surf Scoter*

Telford L. in Leduc Oct. 2 by Paul Payson. **Surf Scoter:** 4 observed at the Groat Rd bridge May 13 by John Acorn, with a male staying behind in Hawrelak Park most of the summer, much to the delight of photographers! The only fall report was from Astotin L. Aug. 14 by Gerald Romanchuk. **Long-tailed Duck:** 2 seen at English Bay (Cold L.) Nov. 6 by Richard Klauke and Ted Hindmarch, 3 seen at Kinasoo Beach by Beaver River Naturalists, 1 seen at Astotin L. Nov. 6 by Gerald Romanchuk, and a small flock seen at Wabamun L. Nov. 8. **Common Loons:** group of 22 seen at Cross L. Aug. 23 by Jim Lange and Janet Watkinson. **Pacific Loon:** 5 seen at English Bay May 29 by Ted Hindmarch, 3 seen at English Bay Nov. 6 by Richard Klauke and Ted Hindmarch, 1 imm. and 1 adult seen at Kinasoo Beach by Beaver River Naturalists. **Yellow-billed Loon:** imm. seen at English Bay Nov. 6 by Richard Klauke and Ted Hindmarch. **Double-crested Cormorant:** 28 observed on the river at Hawrelak Park Apr. 30 by Ken Hansen. **Great Egret:** sighted east of Innisfree July 4 by Coral Grove; another sighting from the edge of Beaumont reported Aug. 29 and confirmed by photos by Gerald Romanchuk and others. **Great Blue Heron:** 3 pair nested in Blackmud Cr. in the Blackburn district and raised young, reported July 2 by Bonnie Young. **Black-crowned Night Heron:** 3 or 4 nests with young observed in Jackie Parker Park in Mill Woods July 11–13. **Parasitic Jaeger and Sabine's Gull:** 150–200 reported from Cold L. May Species Count May 28 by Ted Hindmarch. **Glaucous Gull:** 2<sup>nd</sup> year gull seen at 170 St. and Yellowhead Tr. next to the landfill site. The first reported gulls were early: Fred Whiley and Alf Scott saw 15 Mar. 7 at Wabamun L.

### Shorebirds

**Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs:** seen at Limestone L. Apr. 12 by Gerald Romanchuk. **Avocets:** observed at Watt L. and Akisu L. Apr. 13 by Martin Sharp; 50 along with approx. 40 **Dowitchers** seen at Lyseng Reservoir Apr. 23 by Gerry Fox. **Black-bellied Plover:** approx. 100 seen at the quarry just south of Tofield May 20 during the

Hawk Survey. **Long-billed Dowitchers** and **Pectoral Sandpipers**: still in good numbers at Lakeview on S. Cooking L. mid-Oct. reported by Eric Wallace and Art Hughes. **Hudsonian Godwit**: 1 reported from S. Cooking L. May 2 by Gerald Romanchuk. **Whimbrel**: first reported at Joseph L. May 17 by Fred Whiley, seen May 18 at S. Cooking L. by Gerald Romanchuk. **Golden Plovers**: seen with 5 **Red Knot** May 31 at the quarry during the Hawk Survey. S. Cooking L. was the place to go for shorebirds this season: on Aug. 8 Gerald Romanchuk found a dozen species. On Aug. 10, following bad weather, Linda Jarmolicz and Jim Lange observed 3 **Baird's Sandpipers** on the Cardinal Divide 18 km south of Cadomin. On several occasions both Baird's and **Upland Sandpipers** have been seen on the alpine meadows after being forced down by bad weather while migrating at night. I have only seen this in fall. **Sandhill Cranes**: seen going over through most of late Sept. to early Oct.; one evening in Sept. Ted Hindmarch watched an estimated 10,000 over Hillsborough Estates near Gibbons.



*Whimbrel*

#### Grouse, Doves, and Woodpeckers

**Spruce Grouse**: 1 female seen at Cross L. Apr. 16 by Jim Lange, 1 male seen at Vega Natural Area Sept. 25 during an ENC field trip, 2 seen during the same trip in the Vega sandhills. On Oct. 12 a male (first record) was seen on the Misty Ridge Ski Hill by Jim Lange, and on Oct. 15 another one was observed in the Vega Sandhills during an ENC field trip. **Dusky Grouse**: a female with young was seen on Whistlers in Jasper July 11 by Gerald Romanchuk, Steve Knight, and Jim Morrison. **Eurasian Collared Dove**: one report from Pibroch May 17 and another at Hinton May 19 by Margaret Armstrong. **Mourning Doves**: 2 seen Apr. 18 in Elk Island Park by Ed Mah-Lim; a pair along Hwy 834 south of Hwy 16 May 9 and a pair just south of the quarry at Tofield July 8 seen by Jim Lange. **Black-backed Woodpecker**: 1 or 2 females seen at Bellis May 11 by Richard Klauke, 2 seen in the Opal area Oct. 3 during an ENC field trip, 1 seen in Whitemud Ravine Oct. 8 by Pat Marklevitz, and 1 seen in McKinnon Ravine Oct. 29. **Red-naped Sapsucker**: observed on Whistlers in Jasper July 10 by Gerald and group.

#### Songbirds

**Cardinals**: a pair in Sherwood Park this year raised 3 young compared to 1 last year. **Black-headed Grosbeak**: 1 reported May 30 in Hinton. **Lazuli Bunting**: seen May 29 45 min. east of Grande Prairie by Margot Hervieux, seen near Warburg (confirmed with photos) June 11. **Bobolink**: observed June 3 near Vegreville by Rob Hughes and near Yeoford early June by Horst Tokorsky. **Rosy Finch**: seen near Breton Apr. 2 by Javen Green. **Great Crested Flycatcher**: seen June 10 in Elk Island Park by Gerald Romanchuk. **Northern Mockingbird**: first report from English Bay (Cold L.) June 8 by Ted Hindmarch, seen June 25--30 at the Mildred L. Reservoir in

Fort McMurray by Barb Jewers. The big story is the pair that nested and raised 2 young in the Greenfield district (112A St. and 38 Ave.), reported by Dick Dekker. **Townsend's Solitaire**: seen Apr. 2 at Hwy 14 and Rge Rd 182 during the Hawk Survey. **Evening Grosbeaks**: approx. 200 observed 18 km west of Cold L. Apr. 16 by Carol Hummerstone. **House Finches**: a male reported at Peace River July 4-11 by Bob Lefebvre. **Red Crossbills**: 3 reported at 104 Ave. and 31 St. Feb. 14 by Ted Hindmarch. **Common Nighthawk**: 1 seen at Lake Isle June 13 by Bill Banford, and 1 at Bouchard L. June 8 by Jim Lange. **Mountain Bluebird**: first spring report from the Amisk Cr. bridge Mar. 17, 40 seen Sept. 6 NE of Ft. Saskatchewan by Robert van Essen. **Eastern Bluebird**: 1 pair nested near Amisk Cr. bridge July 2, reported by John Acorn; 1 female observed in the Opal area Oct. 3 during an ENC field trip. **Golden-crowned Sparrow**: observed on Whistlers July 11 by Gerald Romanchuk and group,

another reported mid-Sept. from Fort McMurray by Simone Marler. **Harris Sparrow**: 1 seen at Vilna May 1 by Richard Klauke, another at Hermitage Park and 2 at Grandin Pond Oct. 8 reported by Don Delaney. **Tree Sparrow**: dozens observed at Strathcona Wilderness Centre Oct. 8 by Don Delaney, abundant in the Opal area Oct. 27 according to Eric Wallace and Art Hughes. **Song Sparrow**: overwintered just north of Barrhead, photos and report submitted by Charles Clow. **Brewer's Blackbird**: seen in the Opal area Oct. 27 by Eric Wallace and Art Hughes. **Rock Wren**: 1 seen on Whistlers July 10 by Gerald and group. **Snow Buntings**: estimated 300,000 and 2000 **Lapland Longspurs** observed Apr. 3 on the NW corner of Beaverhill L. by Ed Mah-Lim.

#### Mammal Sightings of Note

**Fisher**: tracks regularly seen at Cross L. and occasionally at Misty Ridge. On the Family Day weekend Feb. 16 fresh tracks in the soft snow below the suet feeders offered no indication if it climbed the trees, but the animal was tracked back to the edge of the deck on the east side of the Chalet. **Pronghorn**: 1 photographed Apr. 24 just west of Holden by Ken Hansen. **Grizzly Bear**: for 2 hrs. Aug. 9 my friend and hiking partner Linda Jarmolicz and I watched a female with 3 yearling cubs in the alpine on the west side of the Cardinal Divide 18 km south of Cadomin. We were viewing from the parking lot with me wishing we were about a kilometre closer, but they would be gone over the hill before we could get there! Watching them on several occasions break into a full-out run for no apparent reason gave us a real appreciation of the tremendous stamina they possess.

#### Jim Lange

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

## Members' Photos

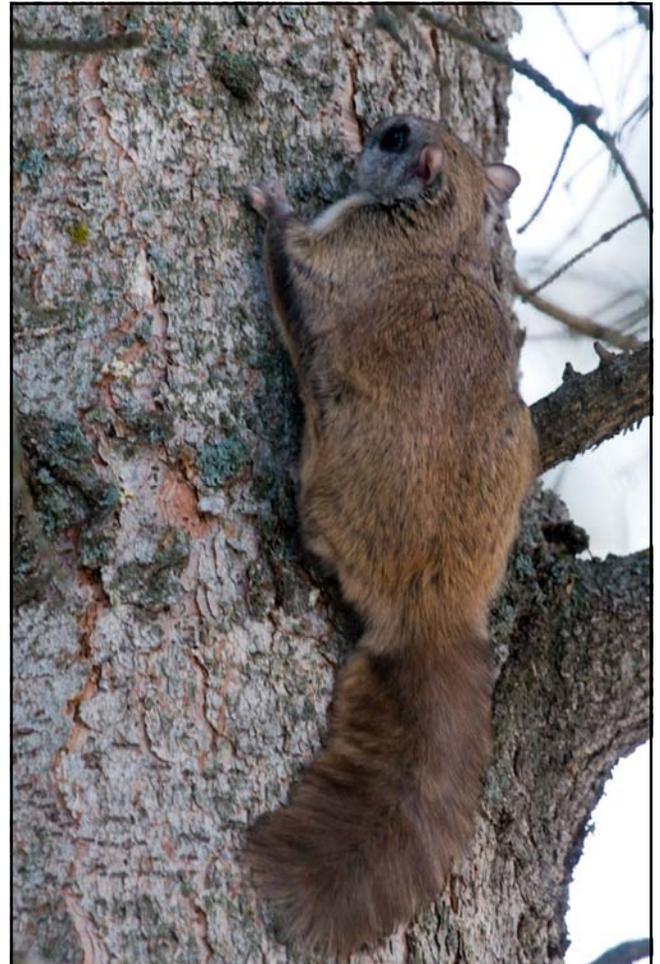


### UNWANTED VISITOR

This summer we had an unwanted visitor in our backyard. It started one day when a neighbour called to ask us if we knew whether an owl would eat the fish in her garden pond. When we visited her yard and saw what turned out to be a Barred Owl in her tree, we told her that to our knowledge an owl like that didn't eat fish (this turned out to be wrong). After several days, some further research, and in talking to Ray Cromie, we decided that Barred Owls do eat fish!

Later in the week when most of our neighbour's fish were gone, the owl moved to our pond. It came every day for about a week and sat on an arbour overlooking the pond. Bernadette reacted quite quickly after one of our five-year-old goldfish lost its tail to the owl. A net stretched over our pond turned out to be a good discouragement, and after about a week of visits the owl took the hint and moved on, no doubt looking for easier fishing.

**Bernadette and Bert Yeudall**



Above: Eastern Bluebird (from ENC trip to Opal). Right: Flying Squirrel.  
Below: ENC field trip to Cooking Lake. Photos by **Dawne Colwell**.



If you have any photos you'd like to share, please send them in to the editor - [geraldjr@telusplanet.net](mailto:geraldjr@telusplanet.net)

# Snow Goose Chase 2010

Photos by **Steve Knight** and  
**Gerald Romanchuk**

