

# THE PARKLAND NATURALIST



JULY-SEPTEMBER 2012

A PUBLICATION OF THE  
EDMONTON NATURE CLUB

<http://www.edmontonnatureclub.ca>



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## Wetland Wanderings

This year for the Snow Goose Chase, John and I were privileged to be wetland tour guides at the Tofield Nature Centre. The morning of the Chase we had a quick peek around the marsh and were just finishing our coffees as the first tour group arrived on the scene. Dozens of children aged three to fifteen tumbled from the buses. Thankfully, there were also a few adults.

One little guy loudly asked John (who was wearing his field hat), “Are you a real cowboy?” After we established that the bus had just driven by a nearby herd of cows and horses, we moved on to the marsh trail. The boy with the slingshot made John and me smile. He was very quick with his instrument, but he only shot the reeds. Was he hoping to bring home a goose for dinner? With a pint-sized hand-holder on either side, I stopped everyone for a close-up bird encounter. The Red-winged Blackbird provided a wonderful show, complete with vocals and flashing wing badges, while clinging to last year’s cattails.



At the next stop everyone touched the pussy willow catkins. Some found them a bit scary, perhaps bug-like? To others they were soft and appealing, “Like kittens!” I heard. Then, through the puddles the little ones and I splashed. The older children and adults avoided the water; I think “Cowboy” did too.



On the viewing platform, we encouraged everyone to look into the water for signs of life. The younger crowd liked the skimmers. The rest of the crowd continued to enjoy the black-birds. It was fun to see both the children and adults so engaged in the experience. Many strug-

gled with language to ask questions about the birds. They wanted to know: “what are they doing...if those are the males, then where are the females...do they live in the wetland...did they stay over the winter?”



Binoculars were passed back and forth. It was obvious from the body language when one of our guests was successful in using them to gain a magnified view. One little character preferred to use his backwards. He obviously liked the concept of a huge wetland filled with teeny life forms.

Lynn (who was a tour guide last year) took over for a short talk on the importance of wetlands. Afterward, we gathered our group for the return trip on the trail. Safely past the puddles, we delivered our visitors to their bus. Well actually, one little person managed to sit down heavily in the muddy water on the way back, but everyone did board the correct bus.

We greeted the next arrivals and repeated the process. Some had the good fortune to see and hear Common Snipes “winnowing” overhead. Canada Geese flew in and out briefly, Common Grackles moved to a quiet corner, and a pair or two of Mallards put in a quacking appearance. It was a very successful day in the wetland.

**Ann Carter**

Photos by Ann Carter

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Applications may be downloaded  
from the ENC website.

**Membership Rates:** Adult/family \$30/year  
Senior \$20/year  
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### Advertising rates

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### On the cover

Children enjoying the Tofield Wetlands during Snow Goose Chase - **Photo by Ann Carter**

## President's Message

It hardly seems possible that I have been president of the Edmonton Nature Club for three years. Time has gone so quickly, and because I am stepping down, I would like to reflect on some of the changes that occurred during my tenure.

With the closing of the Royal Alberta Museum auditorium, our monthly meetings were relocated to The King's University College. While the location is not as central, the lower rental fees have improved the financial health of the club.

Many ENC members have volunteered for various tasks, including Alan Hingston, who assumed responsibility for finding speakers for our monthly meetings. James Fox came forward to coordinate the banquet, and also offered to oversee the mass e-mailing when Morvyn Patterson was no longer able to do it. Ann Carter became the field trip coordinator when Brian Stephens stepped down. As the new editor of *The Parkland Naturalist*, Dawne Colwell is carrying on the program that Gerald Romanchuk put in place. Cecilia Rodriguez took over from Jan McCrum as our treasurer.

I would like to thank Hil and Marg Reine for their many years of service to the club. I also wish to thank Marg for all her diligence and help to me during the past three years. When it was necessary to revise the bylaws, Marg, Hendrik



*Our President, Ron Ramsey*

Krueger, James Fox, Cecilia Rodriguez, Ann Carter, and others contributed their knowledge and expertise. Hubert Taube updated and improved the ENC website. We now have an online website discussion group, which Gerry Fox discussed at our annual general meeting, held on September 21 at The King's University College. The AGM was a total success, due partly to the terrific slide show that Ann Carter prepared from photos submitted by over twenty members.

Other people who offered to volunteer have not yet been given jobs. You really have to be on the executive to realize that this club is blessed with many members who work behind the scenes with little acknowledgement or recognition. These "hidden people" are really the heart and soul of the club.

I feel very fortunate to have met and worked with so many wonderful people in this organization. What I see now is a younger, fresher, more inventive executive that is not afraid to make changes. This bodes well for the future. I will still be involved in the Edmonton Nature Club, but to a lesser degree than in the past.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve the club as your president.

Sincerely,  
**Ron Ramsey**

## Highlights of the 2012 AGM

We would like to thank all the members who attended the Annual General Meeting on Friday, September 21. We had one of the largest turn-outs ever. Thanks also to The Wildbird General Store and Wild Birds Unlimited for donating door prizes.

The ENC executive elected for the upcoming year is as follows: President – Stephen Copen, Past President – Ron Ramsey, Treasurer – Cecilia Rodriguez, Recording Secretary – Jaye Lee, Membership Secretary – Brian Stephens, Executive Directors – Ann Carter, James Fox, Hendrik Kruger, and Gerald Romanchuk.

Thanks to Ann Carter for making an enjoyable slide show reviewing the year's field trips. Kelsey Sharun and Carole Newton from the Young Naturalist Club described their Family Nature Nights, and Gerry Fox gave an overview of what can be found on the ENC online Discussion Group, such as a calendar of events, photos, files, and links. The address is [HTTP// groups.yahoo.com/group/ENC](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ENC) members. Pat Wishart, who is on the advisory committee, gave an overview of the three concepts the city has proposed for Buena Vista and Sir Wilfred Laurier Parks.

**James Fox, Executive Director, Edmonton Nature Club**

## The Edmonton and Area Land Trust: An Update (and a bit more)

I am Raquel Feroe, and in some ways, I love money. More on money will follow; it always does.

I serve as the current Edmonton Nature Club representative to the Board of the Edmonton and Area Land Trust (EALT). I succeed Marg Reine, who has served as the inaugural representative since 2007, when ENC joined five other groups to form the region's only charitable land trust.

I'll omit the aspirational statements (the board is busy updating the business plan) and focus on recent accomplishments and accolades. In 2012 EALT became an Emerald Award finalist in the hotly contested non-profit category. Without pausing to adjust our conservation laurels we acquired another fabulous riparian property called Pipestone Creek. The land trust now holds five properties valued at almost \$5,000,000. A pending conservation easement on Larch Sanctuary will add the only oxbow lake within the city, and bring our stewarded area to roughly 1,050 acres.



Less easily enumerated, but equally enriching, are developments occurring internally. We are about to post Properties and Species pages on our website. Rebecca Ellis joined the Land Trust this year as an excellent project coordinator, expanding that role to a full-time position. Rebecca has garnered a large number of knowledgeable volunteers to help with stewardship, writing, and baseline data collection. In August we voted to add six more capable and connected board members. We've almost reached our fighting weight (we're looking for one more director) and Pam Wight, our focused and efficient executive director, along with Glen Thoman (chair) is organizing us into governance and working teams. Marg Reine has studied in the past year with the Edmonton Community Foundation to learn the means to deepen endowments and build our fundraising tools. She is steering our fundraising Outreach Team, and we are commencing an important yearly

campaign.

Come visit a heron rookery or a moose trail on our lands, and you will fall in love. Snoop around our website ([www.ealt.ca](http://www.ealt.ca)), and you will feel comfortable skipping the pre-nuptials and tying the knot. EALT is the perfect partner. We are financially prudent, hard working, conscientiously collaborative, and dedicated to being there, in perpetuity.

And now for the part I love (in some ways), the money part. ENC helped give birth to EALT and has nurtured us in many ways. Our missions are well aligned and mutually supportive, with EALT serving to save the "Nature" in the Nature Club. When it comes to conservation, money is a lovely tool, essential to both organizations, particularly now with additional development pressures facing the capital area.

When EALT accepts a piece of land there are always costs, even if the land itself is donated. When providing federal EcoGift taxation benefits, things get even costlier. Fair Market Value assessments, land surveys, legal costs, and all preparatory work equal approximately \$20,000 per property. Stewardship then adds an additional budget line.

I sit on the EALT board to serve ENC and EALT. Giving ENC members an opportunity to donate to EALT serves both organizations. When it comes to conservation, it is important to talk about money, specifically, moving money. Think about finding wherever loot you legally can and move it to a place where it will do important philanthropic work, forever, for everyone. Perhaps ENC would consider setting up a named endowment to support the EALT, or we could synergize to develop a joint fundraiser. By voicing the need to this group, I expect leads will develop. Kudos to ENC for being a formidable force in EALT's formation and for all the assistance in our formative years. I am gratefully reporting today that EALT is alive and well and in a great position to leverage your money. I await feedback and direction. Questions? Feel free to e-mail, and I can try to get you answers. If you want to donate today, visit <http://www.ealt.ca/act/>.

### Raquel Feroe

*Photos of Pipestone Creek  
courtesy of EALT*



Pipestone Creek



## The 2012 Snow Goose Chase – April 28 and 29

Nine buses of children from inner-city schools and low-income family organizations, and newly-arrived immigrants, plus the usual three buses for the paying public, had an educational and very memorable day visiting the Tofield/Beaverhill Lake area, east of Edmonton. Weather conditions were a touch kinder this year. Last year we experienced frozen lakes and sloughs, along with snow-covered trails, which restricted some of the planned activities. This year the many thousands of migrating Snow Geese were centred around the town of Holden, which resulted in all the buses making a 20-minute trip down Highway 14 from Tofield town centre. The usual enthusiastic group of scouts were out much of the week prior to the Chase weekend, and nervous geese movements within the area signified to many that the final push northwards was imminent! Ted Hindmarsh again slept in the area in his van for three nights of the event and was very active in tracking down the geese and swan feeding and resting areas. Walkie-talkies were put to good use, and cell-phone calls meant everyone knew where the geese were most active. Thankfully we managed to avoid too much congestion on the roads, and the event organization seemed to work quite well.

Once again the Tofield Community Hall was the centre of the morning's activities. Displays and exhibits were set up, and John Acorn was very active again this year – all wanted a picture with the Nature Nut! Away from the hall, Dr. Glynnis Hood again gave her beaver talk at the Ministik Bird Sanctuary, Ray Cromie was enthusiastically received with his banded barred owl demo at Francis Viewpoint, and Ann Carter and Lynn Walford were busy at the Nature Centre wetlands. Four bluebird nesting boxes, kindly donated by Ben Velner, were installed close to Mr. Kallal's property. Some of the participating groups had their names painted on the front of boxes so that they could relate to "their" boxes. Out in the field, Bob Gehlert (a tireless Chase supporter) and I were fortunate to find a Great Horned Owl on a nest close to Ryley. The nest was close to the road, so all had excellent views through the spotting scopes that were set up. Overall, I would guess most buses saw close to fifty bird species. There was some discussion about early spring movements, but I think the cold weather to the south of us was more relevant in holding up the migration north.

I lost track of all the volunteers committed to this year's Chase, but 80-plus would be a fair estimate! Nature Club members and students from the University of Alberta, Grant McEwan University, and other local institutions all helped to make the event the usual success. The Chase could not happen without the continued support of Vanita in the Tofield town office, as well as Treva Piekema, who again worked tirelessly in spreading the word about the Chase to local schools and businesses. Thanks must also go to Toby-Anne Reimer, Blair Rippin, Jim Lange, Fred Martin, Donna Bamber, Don Delaney, Lisa Priestly, and Barb Rowe, as well as Dawne Colwell, who produced some excellent maps for all the bus routes. We also should not forget to thank the tour guides and leaders on the kids' buses for their enthusiasm and valuable efforts.

Obviously, the club could not do all this without our sponsors and supporters. Enbridge Pipelines was to the forefront again

this year, along with the Downtown Rotary Club, Synergy, UMC Financial, the Alberta Conservation Association, and Cummings Andrews McKay (lawyers). Funding was successfully sought from TD Bank Friends of the Environment, plus the Alberta Government Community Spirit Program and Ducks Unlimited Canada. Other organizations helped out too, so a special thank you to everyone!

### The Inner City Outings

Fourteen different Edmonton groups again filled the nine buses. Local Tofield and Ryley schools also were involved in the activities on Saturday. The Community Hall was packed most of the morning, and all enjoyed the various displays and exhibits. The Valley Zoo hawks and owls demonstration was very well received, as was the Burrowing Owl from the Beaverhill Bird Observatory. The Royal Alberta Museum tables attracted the usual attentive audience, especially the display of snakes, scorpions, and other insects ably handled by Peter Heule, who seems to have developed a cult following! Exhibits devoted to local pond life, fossils, trapper pelts, and the formation of a watershed all created much interest. The bird slideshow put together by Don Delaney was top-notch, as were the food, snacks, and packed lunches ably provided by Margaret Stutzman.

Needless to say, I could continue, but I think the following quotes from letters of appreciation that I received highlight many of the children's thoughts and memories.

*Dear Bob Chase:*

*Many thanks for all the food. I really liked the owls and the friendly Mr. Cromie.*

*Avis*

*Dear Birder Bob:*

*This was my second time on this field trip, the sandwich was great but I took out the lettuce. The owl on the nest was so cool.*

*Amanda, age 8*

*Dear Mr. Bob:*

*I won one of the games on the bus. I thought it was all fun except for the spiders. I met the Nature Nut too. The beaver talk was great, I want one in my back yard.*

*Katherine*

*Dear Bob Chase:*

*Best field trip ever, all the owls were great. The cannon boom was very loud, what fun and the bus did not get stuck in the mud.*

*Mahmoud*

### Bob Parsons

Permission was given for publication of photos of children from the various groups attending the Snow Goose Chase, including the cover, inside cover, and back page of the *PN*. The middle two photos on the facing page were taken by Gerald Romanchuk. The bottom left photo was supplied by one of the groups with permission to publish, and the bottom right photo of Bob Parsons was taken by Tiina Payson.

**UNCLES & AUNTS AT LARGE** **UNCLES AND AUNTS AT LARGE (Edmonton Area) Society**  
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April 30, 2012



**EDMONTON BIRD CLUB**  
 Attention: Bob Parsons  
 Box 11111  
 Edmonton, AB T5T 2M1

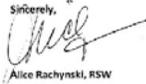
Dear Bob & Other Bird Club Volunteers:

On behalf of all of us at Uncles & Aunts at Large (Edmonton Area) Society and the families we serve, we would like to send our sincere appreciation to yourself and the other Edmonton Bird Club Volunteers for sponsoring the Snow Goose Field Trip on Saturday, April 28, 2012.

Our Agency has been privileged to participate on this field trip for the past few years and we are very grateful for the opportunity to take our families out of the city and let the children experience nature and the great outdoors. We also want to say how surprised and grateful we were for the beautiful bird house that was donated and hung in the country on our behalf. What a wonderful tribute!!

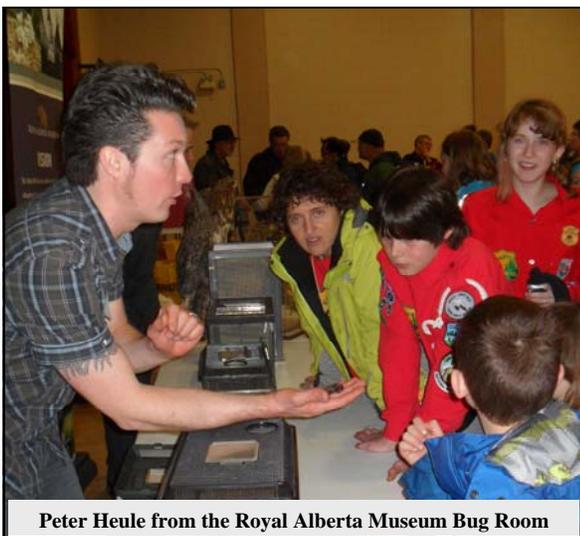
Everyone had a wonderful time and the children were awestruck by all the birds and the interpretative session at the Tofteld Nature Centre. The volunteers were wonderful with the children and all in all it was a GREAT experience!!

It's people like you and your volunteers that make a huge difference in our community and we want to let you all know how appreciative we are. THANK YOU ALL FOR EVERYTHING!

Sincerely,  
  
 Alice Rachynski, RSW  
 Executive Director

AR:lc  
 cc: Adam, Natasha, Clark & Ariel

Thanks for everything!  
 so much for all you do  
 dedicating to the lives  
 enhancing children in  
 great need - Alice

## The 2012 Grassland Tour

### *Brooks/Lake Newell May Species Count, May 19–20*

The Brooks count, now in its 14th year, is traditionally held on the May long weekend. The count continues to be a joint Edmonton/Calgary initiative, this year drawing over 50 participants from all over western Canada, parts of British Columbia, and even Costa Rica. The well-defined count circle includes many reservoirs, Ducks Unlimited (DU) projects, and Eastern Irrigation District (EID) grasslands and spillways. Many large lakes, ponds, and sloughs are found throughout the region, and many small communities contribute to the count. Native prairie grasslands, woodlots, and agricultural lands are well studied by those taking part in the two-day event.

As per usual, I arrived six days prior to the count weekend, which enabled me to talk to the radio station and local newspapers. Linda Hajash, our liaison in Brooks, had again set up things nicely, distributing flyers and brochures. Tillebrook Park campsite was our HQ again, and on arrival I found Ben Velner ready with cold beer and a spruced-up motorhome. These Medicine Hat guys do it in style! Ben and I were soon out and about, scouting out the park and immediate environs. It was obvious most reservoirs were topped up, resulting in some loss of gravel bars and sandy areas. There was a fair amount of water in all the fields close to town, so it looked positive.

Sponsorship funding from Cenovus, TransCanada Pipelines, and DU was a great help again this year, and all companies donated door prizes and give-aways. The first two days were spent in the Kitsim, Cassils, and Rolling Hills areas, and around 85 species were seen. Whimbrel seemed in short supply (300), roads were not too bad, and the golf club had run out of fruit pie! The Fox boys showed up with Ann Carter, so they too were put to work scouting out various other lands and ponds. They do a great job and always tally all birds seen. Peeps seemed in short supply again this year...was it a late migration, or did they overfly the area? Park activity was slow, but we did spot a Long-eared Owl plus a dead carcass. Short-eared Owls were absent, but Snow Geese were seen on Kitsim Reservoir. Thursday was a big bird day, with 103 species seen – can you believe over 20,000 Franklin's Gulls at Kininvie Marsh! The Burrowing Owl was again spotted west of Rolling Hills, but there was much concern about a new oilfield road being put in nearby. The EID was informed, and I think they set up a protocol with the developer. Rain on Thursday turned many roads into mud, but strong winds on Friday dried most of them out. Nashville and Magnolia Warblers were seen in the campground as participants arrived! Zone captains gathered their crews, and we were ready to go out into the ten zones.

### **Count Weekend**

Weather conditions were fair both days, with some cloud but generally sunny conditions around 16–23° C. Several zones did register some strong winds, which made it difficult to hear some of the sparrow species...Baird's and Grasshopper in particular. There was the usual big Calgary turn-out, Red Deer was well represented, and it was great to see many faces from Edmonton. Once again, not many folks from Brooks, but that did not deter us from having a successful count. A total of 161 species was counted, which is just about average.

Unusual sightings this year included Snow Geese (46), Belted Kingfisher, Trumpeter Swan (1), Hudsonian Godwit, Fox Sparrow, Dunlin (2), and Western Sandpiper (5). The muddy south end of Lake Newell was good for shorebirds in general, plus many hundreds of plovers. Low numbers include McCowan's Longspur (2), Whimbrel (11), and Grasshopper Sparrow (3), with Spotted Towhee seen only during the count week. It would appear that many sparrows and warblers had yet to arrive. Our statistics go back to 1999, so I noted the following record high numbers: Greater Scaup (207), Wigeon (423), Least Flycatcher (115), Blue Jay (10), Grackle (706), and Baltimore Oriole (62). Franklin's Gulls totalled 21,580 for the weekend, and Eurasian Collared-Doves were up to 51. Three Burrowing Owls were noted, always a highlight for anyone birding out there.

Missing species this year included Golden Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, Sanderling, Short-eared Owl, Eastern Phoebe, both Kinglets, Western Tanager, Bobolink, and Black-capped Chickadee. This count is on the third weekend, so it is highly likely some of these species were on their way (see Milk River results).

So all in all a great count, except for one minor detail. I received a ticket from the security folks for serving alcohol in a public area! We have used the covered camp kitchen area for many years as a meeting room and social meeting spot. The ticket was handed over with a big smile and mumbling about "Don't worry about it...just doing my job." As we all poured our opened beer and wine down the sink, I thought that's a first!!

### *Milk River/Writing-on-Stone May Species Count, May 26–27*

Seven participants counted a total of 131 species on the weekend, with one species seen only in the run-up to the count. Weather conditions were not too favourable, but counters found some excellent bodies of water again this year. Special sightings included Burrowing Owls (2),

Rusty Blackbird, Long-eared Owl, Common Poorwill (heard by Ben Velner), Whimbrel, and Sanderling (40). Species missing this year included American Bittern, Black-headed Grosbeak, Bullock’s Oriole, Short-eared Owl, and quite a few warbler species.

Records numbers of the following species were counted: White-faced Ibis (80), Bobolink (20), Eared Grebe (2,330), Lark Buntings (171!), Cliff Swallows (2,605), Northern Rough-winged Swallows (1,000), and Ferruginous Hawks (11).

Low numbers this year included Merlin, Prairie Falcon, Warbling Vireo, Sprague’s Pipit (poor weather), Yellow-rumped Warbler, and Common Yellowthroat.

Many thanks to a great crew of participants, plus our sponsors – Cenovus, TransCanada Pipelines, and DU Canada.

**Bob Parsons**



*Some of the birders taking part in the May Species Count at Brooks. The photo was taken by the Brooks & County Chronicle photographer Hugo Brees at the Tillebrook Park campsite.*

Spotted Towhee



Chestnut-collard Longspur



**Photos by Steve Knight**

## After losing their own two young, Edmonton's pair of Bald Eagles successfully fledged an orphan.

As reported in the previous *Parkland Naturalist*, the resident Bald Eagles nesting along the river on the eastern city outskirts were back again in 2012. The family seemed to be doing well, but by July 5 it had become clear that something had happened to the two half-grown young. On July 26, Rick Morse climbed the nest tree and found remains of the eaglets on and under the nest, cause of death unknown.

It so happened that Hardy Pletz knew that the Edmonton Wildlife Rehabilitation Society had just received an orphaned Bald Eagle – a fully feathered female – from High Prairie. At Hardy's suggestion, manager Holly Duvall agreed to have the eaglet placed into the empty nest. It turned out to be a good decision. Three days after the youngster had been securely stuffed into a pack sack and hoisted into the nest, Don Delaney shot the accompanying telling photo. Clearly, big mama had adopted the new kid, who is shown relaxing after expectantly gazing up at the sky for all of those three days of waiting. On August 2, during a violent rain storm, the eaglet spread her huge wings into the wind and lifted off on her maiden flight. She stayed out of sight until August 16 when a friend of Don's discovered an adult and a juvenile eagle perched in the nest tree. On September 8, Don again photographed the youngster on the nest and an adult perched nearby. Apparently, the release of the orphan had been an unqualified success. Congratulations and thanks to all!

**Dick Dekker**



*Photo by Don Delaney*

## Wings over the Rockies Festival

My brother Art and I attended this festival, which is based in Invermere, BC, and ran from May 7 to 13. Bob Parsons was also there.

I had spent the previous week birding around the Okotoks area where my brother lives. It was the right time to be out for easy firsts for the year, and we certainly had our share. Most of our ducks were seen, including a few Cinnamon Teal and one Long-tailed Duck plus a couple of Wood Ducks in Fish Creek Park in Calgary. We did not see any geese other than Canadas but did see a couple of good-sized flocks of swans and White Pelicans, and lots of Avocets and Black-necked Stilts. Killdeers and Meadowlarks everywhere. A fairly large flock of Yellow-rumped Warblers apparently had just arrived and were starving, as they landed practically at our feet and started searching for food.

On Sunday we headed for the festival. My brother had planned an interesting back-road route; we started out but were turned back by heavy snow and really slippery roads. Change of plans – head for the highway. On the Banff to Lake Louise road we pulled off to eat lunch and were entertained by an Osprey, which was wonderful to watch.

After arriving at our motel in Radium we found a great little walk (1–2 km) to a reclamation site which we actually returned to three times during the week, as it was a great place to bird. Dippers (one of my favourites) five feet away from you, clematis blooming everywhere, Yellow-rumps everywhere, a Pileated that flew over our heads and landed on a branch just feet away, plus my first Oregon Junco.

The festival is based out of Invermere, and most of the trips started from the visitor centre there. The centre itself is a great place to bird, with nesting Ospreys, a hummer that chose a bare branch to sit on and pose, Kinglets all over, and basking turtles.

The festival offers a wide variety of trips, which is great. We signed on for one trip per day and a couple of evening sessions, which left us lots of time to poke around on our own. We decided to try the road on the west side of the valley, as none of their trips went there (for good reason). Believe me, the road on the west side of the valley has sections that are next to impassable and some that **are** impassable, (at least without lots of clearance and 4-wheel drive), but we found great displays of calypso orchids, shooting stars, arnica, and prairie crocus, plus a grouse that we could not figure out. We had no trouble with the dozens of Bald Eagles and Turkey Vultures, though.

The trip leaders were very knowledgeable and nice. Surprisingly, although the Columbia Valley is one of the longest undisturbed wetland ecosystems in North America, they do not have a bird club. I also found it interesting to note some of the differences in our sightings over the two weeks. When we first arrived in BC there were no Red-winged

Blackbirds, but in the previous week in Alberta they were everywhere. Mid-week in BC, they appeared in great numbers. The leaders got very excited about three Shovelers, whereas in Alberta we had seen hundreds of them.

The highlight of the trip had to be our quest for Harlequin Ducks. We drove up the road to Panorama Ski Area and stopped at every pull-off, but had no luck. We did see a couple of Dippers, but not nearly as close as those on our little walk. When we got to Panorama, some of us decided a washroom break was in order; the rest stayed on the bridge and were treated to a Harlequin flying downstream. Back in the vehicles and down the road. We did not have communications between vehicles, but one of the last vehicles stopped and we all went back to see what they had found. A female Harlequin the driver spotted flying downstream took to the water and was soon joined by her mate. They proceeded to have a feeding frenzy right in front of us, not 50 feet away. We were there for a good half hour, and they stayed the whole time. This was a lifer for my brother.

Another day took us to some smaller lakes that had been invaded by warblers plus two pairs of Barrow's Goldeneyes.

A Lewis Woodpecker had been recorded the day before, but we did not see it. A



little road that should be named Bluebird Alley produced a number of Mountain Bluebirds, a Wilson's Phalarope that was the only one spotted for the week, and a Great Blue Heron perched on top of a tree.

A retired conservation officer entertained us one morning by showing how they use forensics to catch poachers. It had absolutely nothing to do with birds, but was interesting.

Our last morning was spent at the Kootenay River Ranch, a 1,300 acre conservation property owned by the Nature Conservancy of Canada. The NCC is acquiring pieces of land and hopes to return them to their natural state and get rid of the noxious weeds, but is having problems similar to those of other organizations without sufficient staff or volunteers. Again, we saw loads of birds but the highlight was a Cooper's Hawk chasing a Red-winged Blackbird – the blackbird got away. We also had in-your-face Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers, and a Red-breasted Sapsucker.

All in all, we had a great time and the festival was well worth attending. You can see highlights by visiting the website at <http://www.wingsovertherockies.org/>.

**Jaye Lee**

## Dr. Bridget Stutchbury, The Edmonton Nature Club Banquet Presentation, and *The Silence of the Songbirds*

Dr. Bridget Stutchbury was our guest speaker at the Edmonton Nature Club Banquet held on Saturday, March 24, 2012, in the Faculty Club at the University of Alberta. Through cooperation between the ENC and the University of Alberta Departments of Renewable Resources and Biological Sciences, she also presented two lunchtime seminars that were open to the public. ENC members were fortunate to have the opportunity to hear from this highly regarded researcher and author.



Dr. Bridget Stutchbury was born in Montreal, although she grew up in Toronto. She has an MSc from Queen's University and a PhD from Yale University, has been a Fellow and Research Associate at the Smithsonian Institute, and is currently Professor of Biology at York University (Toronto). Since the early 1980s she has followed songbirds to their wintering grounds in Latin America and back to their breeding grounds in North America in order to understand their behaviour, ecology, and conservation.

### University Presentations

Dr. Stutchbury's first presentation was titled "Conserving Long-Distance Migratory Songbirds: Linking Breeding and Wintering Populations." In her introduction she noted that many migratory songbirds have shown steep population declines, of the order of 50% over the last 40 years. These serious long-term population declines are caused by threats the birds face on the breeding grounds, during their two-way migrations, and in their wintering grounds. However, it has not been possible to understand the connectivity between these threats until the recent development of new research and conservation tools called geolocators. These miniaturized devices are attached to the back of captured songbirds. They include a stalk with a light sensor that records day-length (sunrise and sunset), from which a "fix," that is, latitude and longitude, can be determined. If the bird returns to its breeding or wintering

grounds and is recaptured, the geolocators are retrieved and the information downloaded. An example of the downloaded data is shown in the following map for a Purple Martin.



Answers can now be provided for the following questions:

Where do these birds breed?

Where do these birds winter?

What route do they select?

Do they follow the same route going south and returning north?

When do they decide to leave?

How long do they take to get there?

Surprising and hitherto unknown facts about bird species and their migration have been provided by tracking individual birds. For example, Purple Martins make the spring journey from the Amazon rain forest to Pennsylvania in thirteen days; however, the fall migration is more leisurely, taking six weeks. Even more surprisingly, on their wintering grounds Purple Martins move around, switching locations by several hundred kilometres.

In her second presentation, "Endogenous versus Phenotypically Plastic Migration Schedules in Songbirds," Dr. Stutchbury examined whether migrating birds are flexible enough to adjust their migration patterns to compensate for global warming. The timing of the birds' arrival on

their breeding grounds is important. Too early, and their risk of mortality increases due to poor weather; too late, and their chances for mating and reproduction diminish. It is important for many songbirds that their eggs hatch when the young can be fed on an abundance of insects. As a result of global warming, it is likely that arrival times for breeding songbirds must be altered to hit the “sweet spot” for reproductive success. Are these birds hard-wired so that they depart and arrive on roughly the same dates; or can they adjust the timing and pace of migration to changing circumstances? By using geolocators and studying different populations, it will be possible to assess plasticity (flexibility) in species by tracking the birds over multiple years and looking at trends.

### Banquet Presentation

At the ENC banquet, Dr. Stutchbury provided an overview of her research using geolocators to study the migration routes and breeding and wintering grounds of various species. As a result, potential threats, such as tropical deforestation where a particular species overwinters, can be identified. She briefly described the multitude of other hazards affecting bird populations and vigorously promoted lifestyle choices that would help bird populations. Having seen and heard all three of her presentations, I was very impressed by her ability to take complicated scientific research and wording (“phenotypically plastic”!) and make it understandable for the ENC members at the banquet.

### Silence of the Songbirds

Dr. Bridget Stutchbury is the author of *Silence of the Songbirds*, published in 2007 by Harper Collins and available in paperback for \$19.95. The book describes “how we are losing the world’s songbirds and what we

can do to save them.” The book has nine chapters: the first three set the scene by describing how we know numbers of migratory songbirds are declining. Migratory birds lead a double life, with marathon flights between breeding and wintering grounds, and they are vulnerable to threats all along the way. How each species is succeeding or failing is dependent on where they live, what they eat, and how they compete for the essentials of life: space, food, and mates.

Subsequent chapters detail the causes of declining numbers of songbirds. In “Birds in the Rainforest,” Dr. Stutchbury graphically illustrates the dramatic decline in habitat through deforestation and also notes an associated loss in quality of habitat through fragmentation and the conversion of forest to scrub. Following chapters discuss problems posed by pesticides, large buildings, and cowbirds, cats, and other predators. It all adds up to “death by a thousand cuts,” as these birds face hazards at every turn. A chapter and an epilogue suggest “simple actions we can take every day that will help to promote a healthier world for birds.” Actions such as buying shade-grown coffee and “green” paper products, turning lights off at night, and keeping cats indoors can help save bird life.

### Acknowledgements

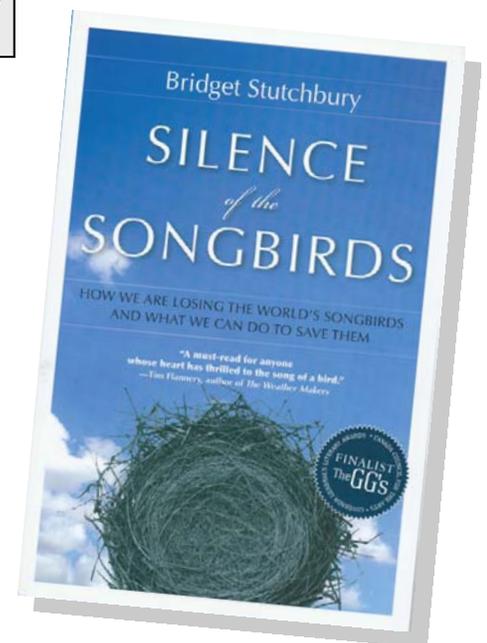
I would like to thank Dr. Lu Carbyn and the Wildbird General Store, who were instrumental in bringing Dr. Stutchbury to Edmonton for her speaking engagements at the university and the ENC banquet. Lu also kindly provided me with a review copy of *Silence of the Songbirds*. Kudos are due also to James Fox and Barb Rowe (and any others) for a job well done in organizing the banquet.

**Alan Hingston**

**Photo and illustration on page 12 provided by the author.**



*“simple actions  
we can take every  
day that will help  
to promote a  
healthier world  
for birds”*



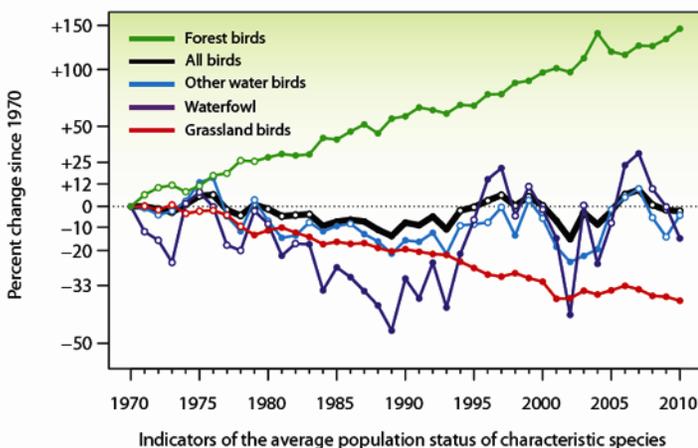
## Book Review: *The State of Canada's Birds*

*The State of Canada's Birds* was published in June 2012 as a collaborative effort by the North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI), a coalition of governmental, non-governmental, and private sector organizations including Environment Canada, Bird Studies Canada, and Ducks Unlimited. The report is the first comprehensive look at population trends for Canadian birds over the last 40 years. It can be viewed online at [www.stateofcanadasbirds.org](http://www.stateofcanadasbirds.org). Overall, the report indicates the country's breeding bird populations have declined by 12% since 1970, when monitoring began for most of the 451 species native to Canada. Of the 451 species, 44% have decreased, 33% have increased, and 23% have remained stable.

The study divides the country into eight different habitat regions and assesses the performance of birds in each region.

### Prairie Region

The prairie region is particularly hard-hit, with population declines of 40% among grassland birds as native grassland

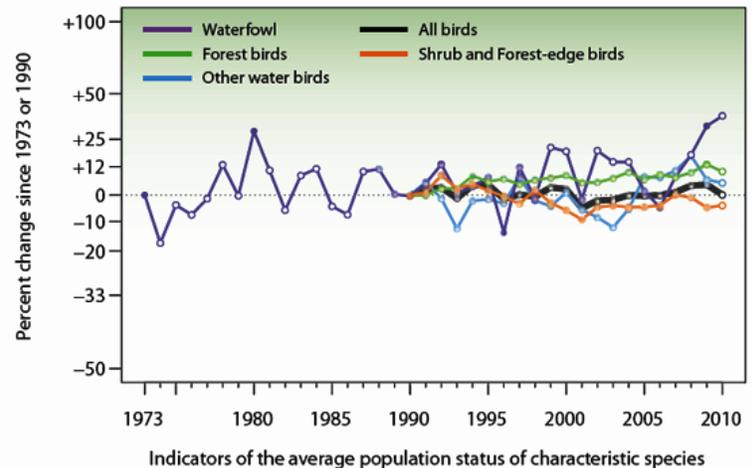


and pasture continue to be ploughed and degraded by agricultural intensification and oil and gas development. Curiously, woodland birds (such as the House Wren) have benefited, as expanding human settlement has increased the area of woody vegetation (e.g., shelter belts).

### Western Boreal Forest

To the north of us in the western boreal forest, bird populations have been generally stable since 1990, with roughly equal numbers of increasing and decreasing species. However, the principal method of gathering data is the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS), started in 1970, with routes mainly in the agricultural and boreal transition areas. Since the BBS did not adequately survey boreal forest habitat, additional coverage has been provided since 1990, but substantial gaps still exist.

Certain groups of birds are doing particularly poorly: aerial insectivores such as swallows, swifts, and nightjars have declined 80% in the last 40 years, while flycatchers are



down 30%. These birds depend on flying insects for food, but the reasons for their decline are poorly understood. Pesticides or contaminants may be affecting the number of insects, or climate change may be causing a shift in the timing of insect emergence. As shown by the studies of Dr. Bridget Stutchbury, species that migrate the furthest between Canada and South America are declining steeply (50% over the last 40 years), with loss of habitat due to forest clearing for agricultural development one of the causes. Shorebirds are another group showing 50% declines, most likely due to loss or degradation of migration stopover and wintering areas.

There have been several success stories. Numbers of raptors have made dramatic recoveries thanks to bans on pesticides such as DDT. Populations of ducks and geese are booming in all regions, probably as a result of cooperation among governments, with the North American Waterfowl Management Plan leading to the protection and restoration of many wetlands.

After listening to the talks in Edmonton by Dr. Bridget Stutchbury and reading *The State of Canada's Birds*, it's difficult to be optimistic about the future for many of Canada's songbirds, particularly the long-distance migrants and those with specialized habitat requirements. The analysis of BBS data reveals a consistent downward trend over 40 years of monitoring. Notwithstanding the optimism expressed in both *The Silence of the Songbirds* and the nationwide status report, I don't see these trends being reversed by individual effort. The numbers of birds are being reduced by habitat changes and loss of habitat, by development decisions made at the municipal and provincial level, and by climate change. Political will at both provincial and national levels will be necessary to overcome these threats.

## Acknowledgements

In reading both *The State of Canada's Birds* and *Silence of the Songbirds*, I realized how much of the trend data reported was based on Breeding Bird Surveys. Jack Park, a long-time ENC member, has organized the Alberta surveys since 1971, a remarkable contribution, and many ENC members have run routes. Additional counters are required; for details of BBS routes, contact Jack or visit <http://naturealberta.ca/alberta-natural-history/bird-projects/opportunities-for-birders/breeding-bird-survey>. Participation does require some advanced birding skills, but these can be learned.

naturealberta.ca/alberta-natural-history/bird-projects/opportunities-for-birders/breeding-bird-survey. Participation does require some advanced birding skills, but these can be learned.

**Alan Hingston**

*Illustrations provided by the author.*

## Global TV Interview on Edmonton's Natural Areas Policies

In late August, at the request of Ron Ramsey, wildlife biologist and former Edmonton Natural History Club President Harry Stelfox agreed to represent the Edmonton Nature Club and meet with Vinesh Pratap from Global TV to record an interview that was aired during the 6:00 p.m. newscast on Monday, September 3. Their conversation took place in the Twin Brooks District and Nature Park. In a letter to Ron Ramsay, who was president of the Nature Club at the time, Harry reported that he “tried to take a positive, but cautionary, approach” in order to make the following points:

### Positives

- The City does deserve recognition for having raised the profile of natural areas and biodiversity conservation over the past 10 years since the Office of Natural Areas (now Biodiversity) was created.
- The Office of Natural Areas has produced a number of high-level policies and strategic planning documents recently that focus on natural areas and biodiversity conservation. They contain a lot of ambitious and good ideas. Expectations for significant progress have been raised.
- City programs such as the Master Naturalist Program and the Naturalization Program are very good.

### Cautions

- It is questionable as to whether the City has the current capacity to deliver in a meaningful way on the conservation of natural areas and associated biodiversity. The challenges are huge, especially given the pace of development in an environment where economics usually takes precedent over environmental interests. The

Office of Biodiversity has limited staff and financial resources to offset the development juggernaut.

- Recent efforts have focused on securing relatively small and isolated natural areas in the tablelands – mostly outside the central core of the City. These sites might provide valuable opportunities for local residents to visit and enjoy nature, but they could easily be degraded by too much activity. Also, these sites are probably unable to sustain high species diversity because of their small size and isolation.
- The focus on tableland natural areas has drawn attention and resources away from core biodiversity natural areas associated with the river valley and ravines. There does not appear to be much on-the-ground stewardship of any of these lands by the City. The City's stewardship strategy appears to rely almost exclusively on volunteers and local community groups.
- Top-of-the-bank development setbacks are totally inadequate in terms of securing the ecological integrity of our river valley and ravine natural areas.
- Residential developments still ignore the need to maintain connectivity between the river valley/ravine natural areas and nearby tableland natural areas – for example, the Rabbit Hill Natural Area in the Magrath area is isolated from the Whitemud Creek Ravine.
- It is questionable as to how much influence the Office of Natural Areas actually has within the City administration for the purpose of influencing planning and development decisions.

**Harry Stelfox**

## Parkland Plant Notes

### And Summer's Lease...

It has been a summer of sun and violent thunderstorms, of butterflies and bees, of mosquitoes and hovering squadrons of dragonflies, of wanted verdure and rank and rampant weed growth, of burgeoning mushrooms...and, for some of us, a summer of sojourns in badlands....

### "Gibbons Prairie" and the Sturgeon River Badlands

There is nothing botanists like better than discovering a new, intact, natural ecosystem, especially if that site is



Sturgeon River escarpment at Gibbons

already a protected reserve so they do not have to fear loving it and losing it. And if that site is close to home so that it can be explored easily in all its seasonal transmutations, so much the better. "Gibbons Prairie," a stretch of escarpment along the Sturgeon River opposing the Town of Gibbons and owned by it, comes close as a discovery of the best kind. Here the river has exposed a 70-million-



Plant fossils from Gibbons badlands. In the foreground are *Metasequoia* (redwood) cones, about 70 m years old.

year-old reach of Cretaceous bedrock similar to that which occurs in Dinosaur Provincial Park, and home to some of the same badland flora. Well, let's not get too carried away. "Gibbons Prairie" is not completely intact, nor is it adequately protected – so far. Here's the story.

Last summer two local members of the Alberta Cactus and Succulent Society, Michael Gibbins and Rene Haasdyck, led Edmonton Naturalization Group (ENG) botanists on a tour of this escarpment to see the fragile prickly pear cactus (*Opuntia fragilis*) (right) growing there. I couldn't make any of the field trips but, my curiosity piqued by the glowing reports, I found time



one dreary Sunday afternoon in November to follow their directions to the site. Of course, I had driven past this patch of escarpment many times on my way north on Highway 28, but I had never stopped to look at it closely. The first thing I noticed from a vantage point close to the highway was deep tracks running up and down and across the hillside, slicing through the snow cover and the turf, deep into the soil for as much as a foot in some places. Yet I could see from the grass stalks standing above the snow and from the snowless patches that this was indeed native prairie, far too rare and valuable for it to be torn up as a playground by the local ATV fraternity. I alerted ENG and the cactus people with photos and alarmed e-mails, and we agreed to contact the Town of Gibbons at once to complain. We got a civil reception from them, but the usual excuses – "we have a bylaw prohibiting ATVs but we don't have the resources to enforce it; Sturgeon County doesn't give us enough enforcement time." It was clear that the town management didn't understand the significance of the escarpment as remnant prairie, and a couple of the people we talked to weren't even aware of the cactuses. However, they knew of its badlands nature: University of Alberta paleontology students had fairly recently removed some plant fossils from it.

In January 2012, we gave Gibbons Town Council a presentation, using photographs, all taken on site, from the summer of 2011 (plus my November photos), stressing the value of the area as cultural heritage and the need to

keep ATVs out. Council listened respectfully, and two councillors were prompted to reminisce about catching garter snakes on the slopes as kids.

This summer we resumed the field trips, now making a serious attempt to document the plant diversity of the site. We started a little late, going out first on June 26, and so missing the prairie crocus in bloom and a number of other early flowerers. We visited again on June 29, July 19, and August 27, and in total logged some 156 species as occurring in the area. Admittedly, not all these are prairie or badland plants; we included species from the poplar-wooded ravine to the south, small gullies of tall shrubbery, and riparian areas, although most of these sites have not yet been fully explored. Grass species numbered an impressive 29. We identified beautiful patches of porcupine and needle-and-thread grasses, the distinctive “eyelash” blue grama grass, intermediate oat grass, and plains muhly, as well as clumps of June grass and various wheat grasses, and here and there the solitary stems of plains reedgrass (*Calamagrostis purpurascens*). I was extremely pleased to see plains rough fescue grass (*Festuca hallii*) in the mixture. A tallish but rather nondescript grass with tufts of fine leaves which are reddish at the base, plains rough fescue is easily overlooked, especially when it isn't in flower, and it does not flower every season. Once a major component of the grasslands of central and southern Alberta, it was extremely important as a forage grass, both for bison and to feed the stock of early ranchers. Our local grass, *Festuca hallii*, is one of a complex of three closely related species, the other two being grasses of the foothills and mountains. The heritage importance of this complex is recognized in its status as the provincial grass of Alberta. Since fescue does not come back after native sod is broken, its presence is always a sign of non-disturbance.

Among the more uncommon species we found – i.e., those that cannot be found on similar bare escarpments of the North Saskatchewan River in the vicinity of Edmonton – was Nuttall's saltbush (*Atriplex nuttallii*), very much a badland plant. Among the four species of milk vetch (*Astragalus*) found at the site is the striking, bushy, two-grooved milk vetch (*Astragalus bisulcatus*), with long clusters of pink-purple pea-like flowers. This plant concentrates selenium where the element is present in the soil, which seems to make it smell bad. I once collected a plant from east of Regina, but the stench was so nauseating as it dried that I reluctantly had to throw it out. Shining arnica (*Arnica fulgens*), is common in the moister grasslands closer to the river. Narrow-leaved meadow-sweet (*Spiraea alba*), which is common in moist areas in natural vegetation on the east side of Edmonton, including the sandhill natural areas to the northeast, but does not seem to occur west of the city, forms large patches in these same meadows.

Almost as satisfying as our explorations has been the liaison we have forged this summer with the Town of Gibbons. One councillor experienced something of a revelation with regard to the site, and along with his plant-loving wife is now visiting regularly. At the town's Pioneer Days event in July, with a colourful display assembled by ENG volunteer Judith Golub, we got the town administration and the local museum (prairie is heritage too, right?) on side. The town's budget next year should include money for re-fencing and re-gating the site to block access by ATVs. And there is talk of ENG leading regular public field trips and of engagement with the schools next year. Local naturalist Patty Milligan plans to start up a cross-county Master Naturalist program using Edmonton's program as a model, and suggests that newly graduated naturalists could help steward Gibbons Prairie in the long term. Admittedly there has been debate as to whether it is wise to advertise the prairie escarpment, given that cactuses are prized for garden transplants. However, most of us feel that a strong educational campaign to increase local appreciation provides the best protection for the cactuses and prairie in the long run.

### Battle River Badlands

Enthralled by our northern badlands experience at Gibbons, we decided to sample some badlands further south



Valley of the Battle River near Donalda

to see how the flora differed. As it happens, in early July I had been shown a spot in the badlands of the Battle River, just east of Donalda, by a friend whose family had farmed in the area. I'd been blown away by the beauty of this river valley and its wealth of prairie species. The badlands here have their own distinctive character; they are more muted with vegetation than the large eroding scarps of the Red Deer River and the rivers of southern Alberta. The buttes are dome-like and clothed for much of their surface with creeping juniper; towards the tops rise spires of white spruce, or thickets of aspen, depending upon aspect. On the steeper, eroding faces of the buttes, in crevices and

overhangs, nestle colonies of another cactus. Unlike the smaller, extremely brittle segments of fragile prickly pear, this has broader, flatter pads and is simply known as prickly pear (*Opuntia polyacantha*). This species is relatively common further south, especially in the valleys of the Red Deer, South Saskatchewan, and Milk Rivers. In the grasslands at the base of the buttes I was pleased to see plains rough fescue again, indicating how very important river valleys with badland landscapes are for preserving prairie species.

Hence I was keen to visit the Donalda site again later in the summer to get a more complete picture of its flora. (By the way, Donalda, a village in Stettler County, is the home of “the world’s largest oil lamp,” an artificial eminence overlooking the broad valley below and the starting point for a coulee hike into the valley. We didn’t do the hike, but we did memorize its existence for future trips.)

By July 31, a different suite of herbaceous species was presenting itself for attention. On the steep clay slopes hairy umbrellawort (*Mirabilis hirsuta*) was in flower. A tall, branched plant with widely spaced umbrella-like flowers of a delicate pink that blow amiably in the wind, it is a photographer’s nemesis. It is in the four o’clock family, *Nyctaginaceae*, which is poorly represented in Alberta, and it does not occur as far north as the North Saskatchewan River. Nor does a common prairie plant that was just beginning to flower, broomweed (*Gutierrezia sarothrae*). We identified four species of sagebrush (*Artemisia*), of which two, long-leaved sage-wort (*A. longifolia*) and sagebush (*A. cana*), do not occur as far north as the Sturgeon River. The remaining two, pasture sagewort (*A. frigida*) and prairie sagewort (*A. ludoviciana*) are prominent at Gibbons.

A 35-minute drive south east brought us to our final destination, that part of the Battle River valley preserved in



View of Battle River in Big Knife Provincial Park

Big Knife Provincial Park. After lingering for a late lunch and a paddle in the river at the boat launch, we set off along the trail beginning at the picnic area in the bottomlands of Big Knife Creek. We hadn’t gone very far before we came across our first butte, rising as a steep ridge more or less parallel to the creek. It had an eroding, sparsely vegetated south-facing slope overlooking the dense mixedwoods flanking the creek, and an aspen-clad slope facing the river. Here was our uncooperative umbrellawort again, taunting us to try again for a focused picture, and also the scruffy broomweed. But there were “new” species, too, including skeleton weed (*Lygodesmia juncea*), and two tall sunflowers in full bloom, common annual sunflower (*Helianthus annuus*) and rhombic-leaved sunflower (*Helianthus subrhomboides*). There were Drummond’s milk vetch (*Astragalus drummondii*), and purple prairie clover (*Dalia purpurea*) too. Of most interest though, on a gentler, grassy slope, numerous plants of silver-leaf Psoralea (*Psoralea argophylla*) stood out because of their grey foliage; their tiny blue pea-like flowers were faded.

Regrettably, exploring this butte was about all we had time for. We could only imagine what delights we would come across on a spring visit, including a hike along the river bank. But perhaps, like leaving the table before one is full, one should always end a field trip while there is more left to explore for next time. I like to leave with ideas for future projects too. For next year these could include discovering more prairie areas along the Sturgeon, and possibly exploring the escarpments of the Peace River area, also a Parkland region, to see how its flora compares.

(Anyone wanting technical information on the park can Google “Big Knife Provincial Park Biophysical Inventory” for a government report.)

The lease is ending.... As I write, unmistakable signs of fall remind us: birds flocking, the yellow woolly bear caterpillars of the spotted tussock moth (*Lophocampa maculata*) out and about, the smell of highbush cranberry bushes in the woods. Yes, summer’s lease hath all too short a date.... But we have a good store of memories and pictures to remember it by!

### A Monarch Summer

As everyone knows, this has been a great summer for Monarch butterflies, which have appeared in many places. At the Edmonton Naturalization Group’s nursery space at the City of Edmonton’s Oldman Creek Nursery, Monarch caterpillars almost completely decimated our small population of low milkweed plants. Some of us were fortunate to be on site to photograph a chrysalis attached to a Canada Buffaloberry bush, and also witness several newly emerged butterflies as they flexed their wings to dry

them. Newly hatched Monarchs give new meanings to the words “pristine” and “perfect”!



Chrysalis of Monarch butterfly on Canada Buffaloberry bush at Oldman Creek Nursery, Clover Bar. Note how camouflaged it is and the necklet of gold dots that give it its regal name.



Newly emerged monarch butterfly at Oldman Creek nursery, Clover Bar, July 28, 2012

### Northwest of Bruderheim Natural Area

A “multidisciplinary” field trip to Northwest of Bruderheim Natural Area on June 24 attracted upwards of two dozen participants, including Alberta Parks staff Coral Grove and Sandra Myers, and area stewards Cathy and George Shea (regrettably, Hubert Taube, the other steward, was on vacation in Europe). While the botanically inclined did their best to explain the vegetation of jack pine forest on sand dunes, interest in the flora was far eclipsed by that in the fauna, ably interpreted for us by our experts. James Glasier identified ants for us, nimbly picking them up between his fingers for a closer look, and

David Lawrie of the Alberta Lepidopterists Guild recorded 17 species of butterflies for the trip. By capturing them with a swift twist of the butterfly net and coaxing them into plastic tubes, he let us get a good look at them and photograph them for reference. He showed us many other insects too. The birding team, led by Brian Stephens and Dawne Colwell, recorded an impressive 31 species of birds, including an unusual sighting of Lark Sparrows. A very successful day! I can provide David Lawrie’s e-mail containing his list of butterflies with links to the University of Alberta’s Strickland Museum to anyone who requests it. Brian’s bird list is also available (see previous *Parkland Naturalist*).

### Wagner Natural Area

An article by Ed Struzik in the July 30th edition of the *Edmonton Journal* drew attention to the challenge the Wagner Natural Area Society (WNAS), stewards of Wagner Natural Area, is facing with respect to rezoning of the land south of Wagner. The society has been in dialogue with Parkland County for years to ask that changes in land use surrounding Wagner don’t harm the groundwater recharge area or preclude the existence of wildlife corridors connecting the property to other natural areas. This summer WNAS took the unprecedented step of hiring an ecological planner familiar with Wagner and environs to present alternative land use options to the county. The WNAS board awaits its reaction.

### Patsy Cotterill

*Photos by Patsy Cotterill*



Long-horned beetle found at Bruderheim Natural Area

## Chasing Birds

### *Shooting Shorebirds (with a camera)*

I could feel my stool sinking further into the mud by the second. It wouldn't be long before my rear end got wet. Problem was, how could I get up without getting covered in mud? When you're holding a camera and a big lens, and your butt has sunk down almost below your feet, it's hard to get enough leverage. No way around it but to put my free hand down in the mud, push myself up, and deal with the goop later.



That happened a few years back, on the shoreline at Beaverhill Lake. It was still THE place for shorebirds in the Edmonton area. One of the first things I learned about bird photography was that for a pleasing photo, you want to be as close to the eye level of your subject as possible. In one of my first attempts, I tried using a small three-legged camping stool. Only problem was that the muddy shoreline at Beaverhill didn't support a stool like that very well. It sank very quickly. Actually, it supported the stool okay; the trouble started when I added my own modest weight to the mix. After I got up, I couldn't even pull the stool out. It's still out there somewhere.

As they say, necessity is the mother of invention. Shortly after that messy incident, I invented the "Shorebird Shooting Bucket" (patent pending). A five gallon pail's solid bottom has enough flotation to support even a light-weight guy like myself (230 pounds is light-weight, isn't it?). With the use of my trusty bucket, I could even get out into the shallow, muddy water and sit down close to birds such as phalaropes that aren't content with the muddy shorelines. There were still more discoveries to be made. A plastic bucket is lighter than a metal one. Finding one that still has a top or a lid is big improvement. Ever sat for a couple of hours on the thin edges of a bucket? Hard to keep your legs from falling asleep. Having a top was pure luxury. Then

I got the bright idea of putting a cushion on top. That was the Cadillac of buckets! The next big leap was finding a two and a half gallon bucket, so I could get lower. Lower is always better when shooting shorebirds.

I remember the day I took my friends Jim Morrison and Steve Knight out to Beaverhill for some shorebird shooting. By the way, guys, I still haven't received royalty payments for the use of the "Shorebird Shooting Buckets." Sorry about that, dear reader – some bills are hard to collect. Back to the story.... We were walking out to the lake and ran into another birder. It must have looked odd, seeing the three of us carrying all our camera gear and the big white plastic buckets. He couldn't figure it out and asked what we were hoping to pick up or collect. When we told him they were for sitting on, he just shook his head and kept going!

Walking through the boot-sucking mud is a physical challenge. If you stay in one spot for too long, you risk sinking, getting stuck, and maybe even losing your boots. Constant motion and using a rolling action with your foot is important. If you try to lift your foot (or your bucket) straight up, things probably won't go well. Steve developed his own style. I call it the "granny walk." He'd lean forward onto his bucket like a granny does with a walker, take a couple of steps, move the bucket forward, take a couple of steps, etc. I would never stoop to something like that. A real man can go mud-bogging without leaning on his bucket!

A much easier and more comfortable way to shoot shorebirds is to do a belly-flop on a sandy shoreline. A place like Miquelon Lake is nice; you can lie right down on your belly on firm ground and not worry about sinking into the mud. The main thing, I learned, is not to wear denim jeans. Even if the sand looks fairly dry, after a couple of hours the denim will soak up every bit of moisture around. Non-birders



*Photos by Steve Knight*



**Steve doing the “granny” walk**

(some of us call them “civilians”) tend to look at you a bit funny if you’re walking on the beach with a big wet mark on the front of your jeans. Unless you like wearing wet jeans all day, I’d suggest something waterproof or at least something quick-drying.

I should explain a bit about why getting low is important.



Getting down to the same level as a little sandpiper makes for a more intimate and a more interesting photo. When you get down low, the background will be further away and it’ll be out-of-focus and soft-looking. That really accentuates the bird. A good background can make the difference between a so-so, mediocre pic and a killer photograph.

Most shorebirds are much more approachable when you get down low as compared to when you’re standing. They’ll often completely ignore you. One of my favourite memories from the days before Beaverhill dried up was sitting on my bucket in the middle of the muddy, shallow water, and being completely surrounded by hundreds and hundreds of dowitchers, phalaropes, and other birds. It was amazing to be in the middle of that much bird life. All we need now is for Beaverhill to recover and attract multitudes of shorebirds again.

**Gerald Romanchuk**

***This photo of the Killdeer below was taken while standing, while the photo on the left was shot while on the ground, “belly-flopping.”***



**Photos by Gerald Romanchuk**



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## What's Bugging You?

### *National Moth Week Survey*

On July 27, 2012, a few members of the Alberta Lepidopterists Guild went out to the Devonian Botanic Gardens to survey moths for National Moth Week. "Moth-ers" in attendance included Dave Lawrie, Gary Anweiler, Bruce Christensen, Ellen Christensen, Kent Zocchi, Ron and Marlene Ramsey, Kristin Walsh, and Rob Hughes; the Hovind family: Cody, Melissa, and Jared; the Miron family: Gaston, Kim, Ashley, Liam, Maddy, and Emma; and the Kagume family: Krista, Jemma, Toby, and Sahara.

The weather was hot and humid as we set up for the event, with a possible summer evening thunderstorm approaching from the west, the perfect conditions for moth-ing, according to Gary. He was right! Excitement and anticipation turned to awe as we intently gazed at the illuminated white sheets covered with hundreds of moths. Approximately 140 species were observed, with 54 species of macro moths identified.



The equipment for a moth survey can be fairly simple and inexpensive. Beginners have attracted moths just by turning a porch light on, or hanging a camp lantern in a tree. Incandescent bulbs will attract a few species, but a cheap and more effective option is a black light. At this event, a mercury vapour bulb was used as to illuminate a white sheet. A cotton sheet is recommended, as it reflects the light best.



These photos of the event were taken by Rob Hughes. Top left: Jared Hovind at the moth sheet. Bottom left: everyone gathered at the sheet. Top right: Melissa Hovind. Bottom right: Let the catching begin; beginners and the experts come together.



Not all moths are attracted to light traps; therefore, we also used bait, a basic mixture of beer and brown sugar. The children participating in this event used foam paint brushes to apply the bait to poplar and birch trees and stood by with flashlights waiting. It didn't take long before the moths began to appear. This bait also attracted several species of butterflies the next day.

### Macro Moth Species List for July 27, 2012, at Devonian Botanic Gardens

Four-Spotted Ghost Moth (*Sthenopis purpurascens*)  
 Lettered Habrosyne (*Habrosyne scripta*)  
 Tufted Thyatirid (*Pseudothyatira cymatophoroides*)  
*Itame occiduaria*  
 Yellow-Dusted Cream (*Cabera erythemaria*)  
 Pale Beauty (*Campaea perlata*)  
 Friendly Probole (*Probole amicaria*)  
 Sharp-Lined Yellow Moth (*Sicya macularia*)  
 Maple Spanworm Moth (*Prochoerodes transversata*)  
 Wavy-Lined Emerald Moth (*Synchlora aerata*)  
*Hydriomena* sp  
 Fragile White Carpet Moth (*Hydrelia albifera*)

*Ecliptotera saliceata*  
 Sigmoid Prominent (*Clostera albosigma*)  
 White-Dotted Prominent (*Nadata gibbosa*)  
 Black-Rimmed Prominent (*Pheosia rimosa*)  
 Northern Finned Prominent (*Notodonta simplaria*)  
 Scarlet-Winged Lichen Moth (*Hypoprepia miniata*)  
 Parthenice Tiger Moth (*Grammia parthenice*)  
 Common Idia (*Idia aemula*)  
 Large Bomolocha Moth (*Bomolocha edictalis*)  
 Clover Looper Moth (*Caenurgina crassiuscula*)  
 Once-Married Underwing (*Catacala unijuga*)  
 Briseis Underwing (*Catacala briseis*)

Semirelict Underwing (*Catacala semirelecta*)  
 Charming Underwing (*Catacala blandula*)  
 Spectacled Nettle Moth (*Abrostola urentis*)  
 Hologram Moth (*Diachrysia balluca*)  
*Polychrysia esmeralda*  
 Two-Spotted Looper (*Autographa bimaculata*)  
 Large Looper (*Autographa ampla*)  
 Hooked Silver Y (*Syngrapha alias*)  
 White-Streaked Looper (*Plusia venusta*)  
 Unmarked Dagger (*Acronicta innotata*)  
 Impressed Dagger (*Acronicta impressa*)  
 Glassy Cutworm (*Apamea devastator*)  
 Lesser-Eyed Sallow (*Enargia infumata*)  
 Even-Eyed Sallow (*Ipimorpha pleonectusa*)

*Homohadena infixa* (*Sympistis*)  
 Dusky Hooded Owlet (*Cucullia intermedia*)  
 Purple Arches Moth (*Polia purpurissata*)  
 Olive Arches Moth (*Lacinipolia olivacea*)  
 Lesser Wainscot Moth (*Aletia oxygala*)  
 Wainscot Moth (*Leucania insueta*)  
 Sordid Dart Moth (*Euxoa mimalionis*)  
 Clandestine Dart Moth (*Spaelotis clandestina*)  
 Great Brocade (*Eurois occulta*)  
 Lesser Black Letter Moth (*Xestia c-nigrum*)  
 Greater Black Letter Moth (*Xestia dolosa*)  
 Collared Dart Moth (*Agnorisma bugrai*)  
 Green Arches Moth (*Anaplectoides prasina*)  
 Dappled Dart Moth (*Anaplectoides pressus*)  
 Catacaline Dart Moth (*Cryptocala acadensis*)

A huge thank you goes out to the Devonian Botanic Gardens for hosting this event and to our experts who came out for the National Moth Week Survey; without their passion and expertise, events such as this would not be as entertaining and informative. Thanks also to Rob Hughes for documenting the event with photos. It is of utmost importance that we continue to take opportunities like this to educate and connect people young and old with nature. We need not only to create an awareness of the amazing diversity of the flora and fauna of Alberta, but also to further habitat conservation efforts and maintain the integrity of balanced and healthy life systems.

This was a small sampling of the macro moths that can be found locally. So turn off those electronic devices and turn on the porch light. “Moth-ing” is an inexpensive way to discover the nightlife in our backyards. Adding a fire and some marshmallows makes for a wonderful evening that creates lasting memories.

**Shelley Ryan-Hovind**

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## Editorial Message

I am sure you will enjoy the articles and photos in this edition of *The Parkland Naturalist*. We have our three columns—**Chasing Birds** by Gerald Romanchuk, **Parkland Plant Notes** by Patsy Cotterill, and **What’s Bug-ging You?** by Shelley Ryan-Hovind. **The ENC Indoor Meetings** column by Alan Hingston will resume in the next issue. Thank you to all who sent in articles and photos.

October–December, 2012, is the next issue. The deadline for submissions is November 30, 2012. Deadlines are always a month before printing.

Next year there will be three issues, one every four months: January–April, May–August, and September–December.

**Judy Johnson** is the copy editor for the *PN*. Her contribution is invaluable. **Pat and Dick Clayton** make sure you receive your copy of the *PN*. They handle the postage, envelope stuffing, and mailing.

**Dawne Colwell**, editor, *PN* ([colwelld@shaw.ca](mailto:colwelld@shaw.ca))

## What's in a name?

Many birds have been named after people. Names familiar to birders include Wilson, Townsend, MacGillivray, Swainson, Bonaparte, Harris, Cassin, Ross, Brewer, Baird, McCown, Lincoln, Le Conte, and Franklin. But who were they? Here are some of the people who have had birds named after them:

**Alexander Wilson, 1766–1813** (Wilson's Warbler, Wilson's Phalarope)

Alexander Wilson was a Scottish poet, naturalist, and illustrator. He was born into a poor family and he apprenticed as a weaver. To pursue a better life he immigrated to the United States in 1794, where he published a nine-volume series with 268 species, of which 26 were newly discovered. He is now regarded as the greatest ornithologist prior to James Audubon. Birds named after Wilson include a storm-petrel, plover, phalarope, snipe, and warbler. Charles Bonaparte named the warbler genus *Wilsonia* after him.



**Wilson's Warbler**

**Meriwether Lewis, 1774–1809** (Lewis's Woodpecker)

**William Clark, 1770–1838** (Clark's Nutcracker)

Lewis and Clark led the first commissioned expedition (1804–1806) by the United States into the Pacific Northwest. They were to explore the region's natural resources for commercial exploitation and to study the region's plants, animals, and geography. Lewis and Clark discovered several species, including Clark's Nutcracker, Common Poorwill, Greater Sage-Grouse, Least Tern, Lewis's Woodpecker, McCown's Longspur, Trumpeter Swan, and California Condor.



**Clark's Nutcracker**

**John Kirk Townsend, 1809–1851** (Townsend's Solitaire, Townsend's Warbler)



**Townsend's Solitaire**

Townsend was an American naturalist, ornithologist, and collector as well as a physician and pharmacist. On an expedition across the Rockies he collected samples of new species that included Mountain Plover, Vaux's Swift, Chestnut-collared Longspur,

Black-throated Gray Warbler, Townsend's Warbler, and Sage Thrasher. Several mammals also were named after him, including a ground squirrel, chipmunk, pocket gopher, mole, vole, and jack rabbit.

**William MacGillivray, 1796–1852** (MacGillivray's Warbler)



**MacGillivray's Warbler**

William MacGillivray was a Scottish naturalist and ornithologist. He was a friend of John James Audubon and helped him write *Ornithological Biographies*. A keen observer, MacGillivray argued that the Hooded Crow and Carrion Crow were separate species. This issue was debated for one and a half centuries, until DNA analysis in 2002 proved MacGillivray correct. Audubon named a warbler after MacGillivray.

**William John Swainson, 1789–1855** (Swainson's Thrush, Swainson's Hawk)

Swainson was an English naturalist, ornithologist, malacologist, ichthyologist, conchologist, entomologist, and artist. Best known for being the first naturalist to use lithography to produce illustrations, he published his own books and sold them to regular subscribers. Famous naturalists named birds after him:



**Swainson's Thrush**

Charles Bonaparte named the Swainson's Hawk and Thomas Nuttall named the Swainson's Thrush. Other birds given Swainson's name include a warbler, francolin, sparrow, antcatcher, fire-eye, flycatcher, and toucan.

**Charles Lucien Bonaparte, 1803–1857** (Bonaparte's Gull)

Bonaparte was a zoologist and ornithologist and the nephew of Napoleon Bonaparte. He was born in France but raised in Italy. Before immigrating to the United States he discovered a warbler, later named the Moustached Warbler.



**Bonaparte's Gull**

On the voyage to the USA he discovered a new storm-petrel, which was later named after Alexander Wilson. Bonaparte published and updated ornithological literature, including birding books and papers.

**Edward Harris**, 1799–1863 (Harris’s Sparrow, Harris’s Hawk)

Edward Harris was an American farmer and amateur ornithologist. In 1824 he met Audubon and they became close friends. Harris helped to fund Audubon’s *Birds of America*. He accompanied Audubon on two expeditions, and a sparrow and a hawk were named after him.



**Harris’s Sparrow**

**John Cassin**, 1813–1869 (Cassin’s Finch, Cassin’s Vireo)

John Cassin is considered one of the great contributors to American ornithology. He described 198 species not previously mentioned by Wilson or Audubon. Species named after him include an auklet, kingbird, sparrow, and finch.

**Bernard Rogan Ross**, 1827–1874 (Ross’s Goose, Ross’s Gull)

Ross was a Hudson’s Bay Company chief trader and naturalist; however, he is remembered more for his contributions to the scientific discovery and knowledge of the northwest than his contributions to the fur trade. He compiled valuable collections of mammals, insects, and birds for the Smithsonian Institute in Washington DC, the Royal Scottish Museum in Edinburgh, and the British Museum in London.

**Thomas Mayo Brewer**, 1814–1880 (Brewer’s Blackbird, Brewer’s Sparrow)

Thomas Brewer was an American naturalist and co-author (with Spencer Fullerton Baird and Robert Ridgway) of *A History of North American Birds*. His full-time career was first in medicine, then in politics and in writing. His spare time was spent writing for Audubon’s *Ornithological Biographies*. Audubon named a duck after him, but “Brewer’s Duck” was eventually identified as a cross between a Mallard and a Gadwall.

**Spencer Fullerton Baird**, 1823–1887 (Baird’s Sparrow, Baird’s Sandpiper)

Baird was a self-taught naturalist who was later mentored by James Audubon, who taught him how to draw scientific bird illustrations. He began his very successful career as a teacher of natural history, became the first cura-

tor of the Smithsonian Institute, and published over 1,000 articles and papers during his career. President Ulysses S. Grant appointed Baird as Commissioner of Fish and Fisheries.

Some bird species were named after individuals who were neither naturalists nor explorers:

- McCown’s Longspur was discovered by Lewis and Clark and named after Captain John P. McCown, an American army officer.
- Lincoln’s Sparrow was named by Audubon for his friend Thomas Lincoln, the first person to shoot this sparrow on a trip to Nova Scotia.
- Le Conte’s Sparrow was discovered by Audubon and given the name of his friend Dr. Le Conte.
- Franklin’s Gull was discovered in 1830 and named after Arctic explorer Sir John Franklin.
- As hard as I tried, I couldn’t find who this Common person was or who this American is that has all these birds named after him.

**James Fox**

*All Photos by  
Gerald Romanchuk*



**Baird’s Sandpiper**



**Le Conte’s Sparrow**



**Common Tern**

## The UPS and DOWNS of an Urban Osprey Eyrie

**2006**

During the summer of 2006 my wife and I saw an Osprey circling over Big Lake. From the BLESS (Big Lake Environment Support Society) viewing platform we had good views of the bird diving for fish. A welcome sight that was. I remember having seen only two Ospreys during my entire bird-watching years in the Netherlands before coming to this great country. The first years, we saw Ospreys during trips to Jasper National Park. Over the last decades, the population seems to have increased noticeably in Alberta.

What follows is a report of my personal observations of an Osprey pair that decided to take up residence on top of a high communications tower in an industrial park in St. Albert, close to Big Lake.



**2007**

*April 21.* I took my dog for a walk. In the process of letting her out of the vehicle, my peripheral vision detected movement high on top of that communications tower. A quick grab for the binoculars revealed two Ospreys interacting with each other. They were excitedly calling and circling around the tower and eventually pair-bonding, culminating in copulation. A little bit of debris looked like the start of a nest. For the duration of that season the nest was built to completion. No young were raised that year.

**2008**

*Mid-April.* The Ospreys were seen. No further information for this year.

**2009**

*April 24.* The Ospreys returned and added more material to their eyrie (nest of bird of prey), which had reached considerable dimensions. That year, two young fledged successfully and could be seen flying around in the area. The adults brought in food, which forced the young to fly back up to the nest.

**2010**

*April 21.* Two Ospreys were observed around the nest-tower, and they raised two young successfully once again. In the fall of that year, the owner of the tower decided to remove the nest, much to the disappointment of the birding community here. When I discussed this with Nolan Crouse, the mayor of St. Albert, who seems to have an interest, he was not very pleased. He tried to contact the owner of the tower to find out why this was done, but never got any reply to his e-mails or telephone calls. By the way, although the Migratory Birds Convention Act makes it a criminal offense to interfere with or disrupt the nest of a migratory bird, that law is only valid during active nesting.

**2011**

*April 25.* The Ospreys returned again, this time to a "NO NEST" site. The question now is, will they stay and rebuild or go elsewhere. They stayed. In the early morning hours the Ospreys could be seen flying in with sticks and old cattail stalks, but failed to get a base established that would hold. It was disheartening to watch all that effort without any results. Eventually some larger sticks got stuck somehow, and by the end of the season a new, albeit smaller, nest is again on top of the tower. They also tried the next tower a bit farther south but stopped building there. No young were raised that year.

**2012**

*April 25.* Once again the Ospreys returned and did some renovations at the nest. This time a third Osprey was seen with the resident pair. In 2010, a second pair of Ospreys raised young on the steel tower of a transmission line along Township Road 532A, west of St. Albert, and on checking that nest this year, I found two young birds on it. In 2010 a pair of Bald Eagles also successfully raised two young along that same stretch of power-line a few kilometres east of the Ospreys. Sometimes we could observe a Bald Eagle chasing an Osprey and trying to steal its prey. Unfortunately, the Eagles' nest was removed.

*July 16.* A positive assessment is made; there is one young on the nest. I could see a stubby wing being raised.

Subsequent observations were made by watching the nest through a 20X spotting scope that showed more interesting aspects of what goes on in the life of a nesting Osprey pair.



For instance, one adult kept bringing clumps of floating thready algae to the nest. This stuff was plucked off the water surface in full flight (no big deal for an Osprey). An adult also re-arranged big sticks on the nest while the young stood on the rim, often frantically flapping its wings to get the strength to fly. On a day with a very strong wind it managed to hover over the nest about two feet in the air. I can imagine how excited that bird must have felt.

*August 10.* The young made its “maiden flight.” It flew around the tower with one adult continually mock-battling it. That is one way of learning how to fly! Some days the nest is empty, with no birds anywhere to be seen, but on other days I saw three Ospreys on the nest, with one of the adults proffering choice bits to the young. How little we actually know.

By the end of September or early October, the Ospreys will no longer be seen around here; they’ve gone south, and I am looking forward to their return in 2013.

**Ludo Bogaert**



**Fledged juvenile osprey above, adult below**



**Photos by Ludo Bogaert**

**Field Trip Reports**

**Hawrelak Park – September 23, 2012 (for eBird)**

Strolling through Hawrelak Park, our group of nineteen chatted and enjoyed the fall colours. Everyone helped count the birds, although not all birds were seen by all participants.

The White-throated Sparrows were elusive as they moved through the trailside bushes. We could hear them but saw only a few. We counted around the pond and down to the bridge and then continued past it on the footpath, hoping for other species. Things were pretty quiet on the lower trail. Heading back to our starting point, we (along with some magpies) were drawn to a group of excited crows perched in an evergreen on the pond island. Had they located an owl? We spent some time carefully scanning the area, but we’ll never know what their sharp eyes saw that ours did not. Highlights included good views of a Pileated Woodpecker, a Hairy Woodpecker, and a Downy Woodpecker, as well as a lovely Red-eyed Vireo.

**Red-eyed Vireo**



**Photo by Gerald Romanchuk**

We counted 30 species, plus an unidentified accipiter and unidentified thrush:

- |                          |                         |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| Double-crested Cormorant | Red-eyed Vireo          |
| Canada Goose             | Blue Jay                |
| Mallard                  | Black-billed Magpie     |
| American Wigeon          | American Crow           |
| Lesser Scaup             | Common Raven            |
| Common Goldeneye         | Black-capped Chickadee  |
| Merlin                   | Red-breasted Nuthatch   |
| American Coot            | White-breasted Nuthatch |
| Franklin’s Gull          | Ruby-crowned Kinglet    |
| Ring-billed Gull         | American Robin          |
| Rock Dove                | Yellow-rumped Warbler   |
| Northern Flicker         | Palm Warbler            |
| Downy Woodpecker         | White-throated Sparrow  |
| Hairy Woodpecker         | White-crowned Sparrow   |
| Pileated Woodpecker      | Dark-eyed Junco         |

Mammals: red squirrel

**Ann Carter**

## Field Trip Reports

### Fall Migration at Elk Island – September 8, 2012

On Saturday, September 8, we had a big group of 31 birders come out for an Edmonton Nature Club trip to Elk Island. It was pretty interesting getting a convoy of 17 vehicles down the parkway! We all enjoyed the beautiful weather and some decent birds. Some highlights included a family group of Trumpeter Swans on the north end of the park; some distant Snow Geese flying over – first of the season for most of us; a good showing of raptors, including a nice slow fly-by by a juvenile Broad-winged Hawk; and some big flocks of Sandhill Cranes cruising over. We saw lots of Yellow-rumped Warblers, but only a couple of other warbler species.

By 4:00 p.m., the heat was getting a bit much, so about 14 of us settled in for a relaxing wiener roast. We had a great day – thanks to all the participants!



Following is a complete list of the 62 species seen or heard during the Elk Island trip.

Horned Grebe	Merlin
Eared Grebe	Peregrine Falcon
Red-necked Grebe	American Coot
Pied-billed Grebe	Sandhill Crane
Western Grebe	Killdeer
Double-crested Cormorant	Greater Yellowlegs
American Bittern	Bonaparte's Gull
Great Blue Heron	Ring-billed Gull
Trumpeter Swan	Common Tern
Greater White-fronted Goose	Northern Flicker
Snow Goose	Downy Woodpecker
Canada Goose	Pileated Woodpecker
Mallard	Red-eyed Vireo
Gadwall	Blue Jay
American Wigeon	Black-billed Magpie
Northern Shoveler	American Crow
Blue-winged Teal	Common Raven
Green-winged Teal	Barn Swallow
Lesser Scaup	Black-capped Chickadee
Ring-necked Duck	White-breasted Nuthatch
Canvasback	Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Redhead	American Robin
Common Goldeneye	European Starling
Barrow's Goldeneye	Cedar Waxwing
Bufflehead	Black-and-white Warbler
Ruddy Duck	Orange-crowned Warbler
Turkey Vulture	American Redstart
Sharp-shinned Hawk	Palm Warbler
Broad-winged Hawk	Yellow-rumped Warbler
Bald Eagle	White-throated Sparrow
American Kestrel	Pine Siskin

**Gerald Romanchuk**

### Shorebird Field Trip – August 25, 2012

Twenty of us from the Edmonton Nature Club went out to the southeast looking for shorebirds. We toured through Cooking Lake (SE end), Miquelon Lake, the Quarry south of Tofield, Amisk Creek Bridge, and Holden. It was cool, blustery day, mostly over-cast – luckily, no rain until we were leaving Tofield. One bonus from the cool wind – no mosquitoes!

In general, the shore-birding around Edmonton has been pretty quiet lately, and today was no exception. The mudflat on the east end of Cooking Lake was under water; there were lots of avocets and yellowlegs, a few Stilt Sandpipers, but very few peeps. At Miquelon, we found a few birds near the boat launch, including Black-bellied Plover and Godwits. The Quarry, Amisk Creek, and Holden were all very quiet, but we did add Wilson's Snipe and Red-necked Phalarope.

American Avocets



The following shorebirds were found:

Black-bellied Plover	Least Sandpiper
Killdeer	Baird's Sandpiper
American Avocet	Pectoral Sandpiper
Spotted Sandpiper	Stilt Sandpiper
Lesser Yellowlegs	Short-billed Dowitcher (juvenile)
Hudsonian Godwit	Wilson's Snipe
Marbled Godwit	Wilson's Phalarope
Semipalmated Sandpiper	Red-necked Phalarope

Otherwise, we saw lots of common ducks and gulls. Raptors included Northern Harrier, Red-tailed and Swainson's Hawks, Merlin, and American Kestrel. We also picked up a Say's Phoebe southwest of Tofield.

### Gerald Romanchuk



Marbled Godwits

**Photo by Janice Hurlburt**

## Field Trip Reports

### NW of Bruderheim Natural Area – August 19, 2012

Seven of us did the “short” loop through the western segment of the northwest Bruderheim Natural Area. We got going around 9:15 a.m. and finished around 12:15 p.m., by which time the temperature was up to 27° C. Although the first km or so seemed very quiet, we then hit a mixed flock of sparrows and warblers – Palm Warbler and American Tree Sparrow being the highlights of that group. In the same area we had good looks at a Hermit Thrush. Not too much further on, we took a branch trail west and found a Black-backed Woodpecker and Philadelphia Vireo. We continued around the loop, adding a number of sparrows.

After lunch we parted ways. Five of us stopped on the eastern edge of the area that has been sold, and found Le Conte’s Sparrow and Red-tailed Hawk.

Thanks to Hubert Taube, who is a regular out there, for details about where we were and the recent changes adjacent to the area.

Total Species for the Natural Area: 28

Black-backed Woodpecker

Burnt trees at Bruderheim NA



Photo by Gerald Romanchuk



Photo by Ann Carter

- |                                   |                                 |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Red-tailed Hawk                   | Hermit Thrush                   |
| Mourning Dove                     | Cedar Waxwing                   |
| Western Wood Pewee                | Yellow Warbler                  |
| Northern Flicker (Yellow-shafted) | Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warbler  |
| Downy Woodpecker                  | Palm Warbler                    |
| Black-backed Woodpecker           | American Redstart               |
| Least Flycatcher                  | Chipping Sparrow                |
| Philadelphia Vireo                | Clay-colored Sparrow            |
| American Crow                     | American Tree Sparrow           |
| Black-capped Chickadee            | Le Conte’s Sparrow              |
| Boreal Chickadee                  | Dark-eyed (Slate-colored) Junco |
| Red-breasted Nuthatch             | White-throated Sparrow          |
| House Wren                        | American Goldfinch              |
| American Robin                    | Pine Siskin                     |

**Brian Stephens**

### Emily Murphy Park – August 18, 2012

The shaded trails in this riverside park were a pleasant place to be on such a calm, sultry morning. The group of 17 walked single file up and down the hill on narrow trails that passed through patches of hazelnut and rose bushes. Don Delaney did a great job of navigating.

We found a few spots with good bird activity and peered into the trees to locate our targets, the migrating warblers. Our talented leader, Richard Knapton, helped us identify nine of these tiny songbirds, and we had good looks at some individual birds that stopped on open perches.

Highlights included a Magnolia Warbler that met us at the start of the walk, a visible and vocal American Redstart, and both Philadelphia and Red-eyed Vireos that chose prominent perches and gave everyone time to view them.

A personal highlight was a small flock of Red-winged Crossbills, as I had been unable to find them in my backyard (unlike many folks this year!).

The total species for the day is 30: a complete list follows thanks to Brian Stephens:

- |                         |                                |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Ring-billed Gull        | Swainson’s Thrush              |
| California Gull         | Gray Catbird                   |
| Rock Dove               | Cedar Waxwing                  |
| Downy Woodpecker        | Tennessee Warbler              |
| Pileated Woodpecker     | Orange-crowned Warbler         |
| Alder Flycatcher        | Yellow Warbler                 |
| Philadelphia Vireo      | Magnolia Warbler               |
| Red-eyed Vireo          | Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warbler |
| Blue Jay                | Blackpoll Warbler              |
| Black-billed Magpie     | American Redstart              |
| American Crow           | Ovenbird                       |
| Black-capped Chickadee  | Common Yellowthroat            |
| White-breasted Nuthatch | Rose-breasted Grosbeak         |
| House Wren              | Song Sparrow                   |
| American Robin          | Red Crossbill                  |

**Ann Carter**



DC

## Field Trip Reports

### Lake Beaumaris – August 16, 2012

Twenty-two of us went for an evening walk around Lake Beaumaris in North Edmonton. We couldn't have asked for better weather; it was warm, sunny and there was a slight breeze.

Our species list included the following 29 birds:

Horned Grebe	Ring-billed Gull
Red-necked Grebe	California Gull
Pied-billed Grebe	Rock Pigeon
Black-crowned Night-Heron	Least Flycatcher
Canada Goose	Blue Jay
Mallard	Black-billed Magpie
Blue-winged Teal	American Crow
Lesser Scaup	Black-capped Chickadee
Common Goldeneye	American Robin
Hooded Merganser	Cedar Waxwing
Merlin	European Starling
Lesser Yellowlegs	Common Grackle
Red-necked Phalarope	House Finch
Bonaparte's Gull	House Sparrow
Franklin's Gull	

While I was waiting for people to arrive, I also saw a Redhead, and an Osprey did a fly-by.

#### James Fox



*Photo by Ann Carter*



Hooded Merganser (non-breeding)

DC

### Strathcona Science Park – August 11, 2012

Eighteen of us went to the Strathcona Science Park for an early-morning visit to Janos Kovac's banding station. Big thanks to Janos and his volunteer assistants Toby-Ann Reimer and Art Hughes for sharing their time and expertise. We got to see Janos process Least Flycatcher, Yellow Warbler, Tennessee Warbler (4), Northern Waterthrush, and Ovenbird. The last two were caught at the same time, and it was very interesting to see a close-up comparison.

The boardwalk on the south end of the park was very birdy. We saw Osprey, Sharp-shinned, Red-tailed, and Swainson's Hawks, Belted Kingfisher, Downy Woodpecker, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Eastern Kingbird, American Crow, Common Raven, Blue Jay, Barn Swallow, Black-capped Chickadee, American Robin, Gray Catbird, Cedar Waxwing, Black-and-white Warbler, Yellow Warbler, and Tennessee Warbler, American Redstart, White-throated Sparrow, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, American Goldfinch, and Pine Siskin.

After the nets were closed, a few of us drove over to the Beverly Bridge. We saw one adult and one juvenile Peregrine Falcon perched on the railroad bridge.

Next stop was most important – lunch! Afterwards six of us decided to try for shorebirds on the south side of Cooking Lake at the RR214 access. Numbers and variety were way down from the past week or so. We did see a couple of Peregrine flights, a Bald Eagle, and a Juvenile Harrier. There was a large flock of Avocets, Semipalmated Plover, Lesser Yellowlegs, and Semipalmated, Least, and Baird's Sandpipers, and some large flocks of Red-necked Phalaropes out over the water. Lots of brown ducks and various gulls. A few Le Conte's Sparrows were still singing.

Three of us who hadn't had enough yet continued on to Miquelon Lake. Not a whole lot happening there, but we did add Black-bellied Plover, Marbled Godwit, Sanderling, and a probable Short-billed Dowitcher to our lists.

#### Gerald Romanchuk

Ovenbird and Northern Waterthrush



*Photo by Gerald Romanchuk*

## Field Trip Reports

### Bilby Area and Imrie County Park – July 14, 2012

Eight of us reached the Bilby area around 9 a.m. After a short stop at the south end where the creek that passes through Bilby Natural Area crosses TWP 544, we entered the area at the northwest corner, following the creek to the south boundary, then the fence line to the southeast corner, and the trails north and west to our starting point. As advertised, the trail along the south was “over hill and dale,” particularly some steep bits. But the area seemed to have had less rain than Edmonton and was generally passable. The large beaver ponds at the northwest corner are largely drained. The total distance was about 5.2 km (3.2 miles) and took 3 hours – but butterflies, moths, and birds added to the distance. (The Police Car Moth, White Admiral, Skippers, Cabbage Butterfly, and Fritillaries are the probable moths and butterflies, but there were others).

We went north about a kilometre to Imrie County Park for lunch and a walk out to the viewing blind on Devil’s Lake. Here we were joined by Don Delaney, who had discovered that the other loop trails were not loops due to flooding. We added several species along the trail and at the lake. For the Bilby area and Imrie County Park, we had the 43 species listed below.

Some of us went over to Lake Isle to see if we could spot the Great Egret, but no luck. However, we added a number of species along the way and at the east end of the lake, for a total species list of 53 for the day. It was nice that most of the walking was partly shaded in the woods.

#### *Species seen in Bilby Natural Area and Imrie County Park (43)*

Common Loon	Yellow Warbler
Red-necked Grebe	Yellow-Rumped (Myrtle) Warbler
Great Blue Heron	Ovenbird
Mallard	Common Yellowthroat
Green-winged Teal	Chipping Sparrow
Black Tern	Clay-colored Sparrow
Bufflehead	Song Sparrow
Red-tailed Hawk	Lincoln’s Sparrow
American Kestrel	Swamp Sparrow
Sora	Dark-eyed (Slate-colored) Junco
American Coot	White-throated Sparrow
Ruffed Grouse	Red-winged Blackbird
Spotted Sandpiper	Brewer’s Blackbird
Franklin’s Gull	American Goldfinch
Forster’s Tern	
Northern Flicker (Yellow-shafted)	<i>Species seen at Lake Isle (13)</i>
Least Flycatcher	Red-necked Grebe
Eastern Phoebe	Canada Goose
Red-eyed Vireo	American Wigeon
Blue Jay	Ring-necked Duck
Cliff Swallow	Canvasback
Black-capped Chickadee	Osprey
Boreal Chickadee	American Coot
House Wren	American Crow
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	Raven
American Robin	Tree Swallow
Hermit Thrush	Cliff Swallow
Cedar Waxwing	Purple Martin
Tennessee Warbler	Mountain Bluebird

**Brian Stephens**

### Whitemud Creek Walk – July 10, 2012

Seven of us walked through the north end of Whitemud Creek, where it was just a touch cooler. Not a lot of variety but interesting mixed-feeding flocks and lots of opportunities to discuss bird behaviour at this time of year. For example, the Red-eyed Vireo singing was likely a male still hoping for a mate, while the female Goldeneye that came quite close to us may have had chicks tucked away under the creek bank.

We also had a good look at a Bank Swallow colony – lots of adults bringing food to chicks just peeking out of the holes.

We saw the following 19 species:

Mallard	Black-capped Chickadee
Common Goldeneye	White-breasted Nuthatch
Red-tailed Hawk	American Robin
Rock Pigeon	Yellow Warbler
Downy Woodpecker	Yellow-rumped Warbler
Hairy Woodpecker	Chipping Sparrow
Red-eyed Vireo	White-throated Sparrow
Black-billed Magpie	Cedar Waxwing
American Crow	Pine Siskin
Bank Swallow	

**Brian Stephens**



DC

### Hawrelak Park – July 25, 2012

On June 28, a week or so before the city chlorinated the pond in Hawrelak Park, my trip co-leader and I made a walk around the pond. On this trip we were lucky enough to observe large numbers of Lesser Scaup and Mallards with young, in addition to the following:

Horned Grebe  
Canada Goose  
American Wigeon  
Common Goldeneye  
Ring-billed Gull  
California Gull

When three of us made the same trip on July 25, we saw:

Horned Grebe (two young, no adults)  
Canada Geese  
Mallard  
American Wigeon  
Lesser Scaup  
Common Goldeneye

In addition, we also sampled for and found a wide diversity of aquatic insects. The chlorination for the triathlon seemed to have little impact on the insect diversity in the pond.

**Michael Frost**

## Field Trip Reports

### Birds of the Parkland/Prairie Transition – July 7 – 8, 2012

Twenty-two club members started at the Ellis Bird Farm east of Lacombe, where we enjoyed an informative introduction to the site from Myrna Pearman. We explored the garden, woodland, pond, and parkland habitats, being thoroughly impressed by the diversity of birds present in this area from which House Sparrows and Starlings have been effectively excluded.

From there some moved on to Dry Island Buffalo Jump Provincial Park, where we watched raptors from the park overlook. With lots of water and sunscreen, the group walked through the riparian forest along the edge of the Red Deer River and the adjacent grassland and badland habitats. The native flower and cactus blooms added to our enjoyment of the area.

Eight of us overnighted in the Trochu/Three Hills area and continued for a second day of birding. Tolman Badlands Provincial recreation area was explored both in the evening and on the Sunday morning. (Those camping “enjoyed” the very early morning bird-song.) After breakfast we headed east towards Hanna, birding as we travelled, and then took back roads east of Highway 36 north towards Castor, where we went our separate ways and returned to Edmonton. We enjoyed spectacular weather throughout, albeit a bit hot, and saw a total of 100 species (63 on day 1 and 75 on day 2).

The undoubted highlight of the trip was discovering that what we thought at first glance was a pair of egrets was actually a pair of Whooping Cranes! (Sorry, the location will not be disclosed.) The many other highlights included watching a Golden Eagle, a Swainson’s Hawk, and a Red-tailed Hawk soaring together at Dry Island, two Say’s Phoebes at Dry Island (a life bird for two members), five Lark Buntings and an Upland Sandpiper north of Hanna, and two Sharp-tailed Grouse and numerous Loggerhead Shrikes south of Castor. All in all, a very nice mix of waterfowl, shorebirds, raptors, and grassland/dryland species along with many of the classic Parkland birds.

The list of 100 species follows:

Canada Goose	Double-crested Cormorant
American Wigeon	American White Pelican
Mallard	Great Blue Heron
Blue-winged Teal	Turkey Vulture
Cinnamon Teal	Northern Harrier
Northern Shoveler	Swainson’s Hawk
Northern Pintail	Red-tailed Hawk
Green-winged Teal	Ferruginous Hawk
Redhead	Golden Eagle
Ring-necked Duck	Merlin
Lesser Scaup	Sora
Bufflehead	American Coot
Common Goldeneye	Whooping Crane
Ruddy Duck	Killdeer
Gray Partridge	American Avocet
Sharp-tailed Grouse	Spotted Sandpiper
Pied-billed Grebe	Solitary Sandpiper
Horned Grebe	Willet
Red-necked Grebe	Lesser Yellowlegs
Eared Grebe	Upland Sandpiper

Marbled Godwit	Cliff Swallow
Pectoral Sandpiper	Barn Swallow
Short-billed Dowitcher	Black-capped Chickadee
Long-billed Dowitcher	White-breasted Nuthatch
Wilson’s Snipe	House Wren
Wilson’s Phalarope	Mountain Bluebird
Franklin’s Gull	Veery
Ring-billed Gull	American Robin
Black Tern	Gray Catbird
Rock Pigeon	Brown Thrasher
Mourning Dove	European Starling
Common Nighthawk	Cedar Waxwing
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	Common Yellowthroat
Downy Woodpecker	Yellow Warbler
Northern Flicker	Spotted Towhee
Western Wood-Pewee	Clay-colored Sparrow
Least Flycatcher	Vesper Sparrow
Say’s Phoebe	Lark Bunting
Western Kingbird	Savannah Sparrow
Eastern Kingbird	Song Sparrow
Loggerhead Shrike	Red-winged Blackbird
Red-eyed Vireo	Yellow-headed Blackbird
Black-billed Magpie	Western Meadowlark
American Crow	Brewer’s Blackbird
Common Raven	Common Grackle
Horned Lark	Brown-headed Cowbird
Purple Martin	House Finch
Tree Swallow	Pine Siskin
Northern Rough-winged Swallow	American Goldfinch
Bank Swallow	House Sparrow

### Martin Sharp and Ann Carter



Purple Martin

Photo by Gerald Romanchuk

## Field Trip Reports

### John E. Poole Natural Area – July 2, 2012

This stunningly beautiful summer morning was much enjoyed by our group of eighteen. Leader Richard Knapton’s goal for number of species was quickly reached and well surpassed, as the stillness of the air provided perfect viewing conditions and some long-range identifications by song.

An Osprey entertained us with its fishing prowess. (He wasn’t quite as good at keeping his wriggling catch though, as his first course ended up in the grass under the power pole perch.) Uninhibited Soras poked along the cattails and were much photographed. An Eastern Kingbird posed while Black Terns skimmed the water’s surface.

A good variety of waterfowl, marsh birds, sparrows, and swallows mixed with a few shorebirds and warblers added up to a total of 60 species for the morning.

- |                        |                         |
|------------------------|-------------------------|
| Pied-billed Grebe      | Downy Woodpecker        |
| Horned Grebe           | Alder Flycatcher        |
| Red-necked Grebe       | Eastern Kingbird        |
| Eared Grebe            | Red-eyed Vireo          |
| American White Pelican | Black-billed Magpie     |
| Great Blue Heron       | American Crow           |
| Gadwall                | Tree Swallow            |
| American Wigeon        | Bank Swallow            |
| Mallard                | Barn Swallow            |
| Blue-winged Teal       | Cliff Swallow           |
| Green-winged Teal      | Black-capped Chickadee  |
| Northern Shoveler      | Marsh Wren              |
| Northern Pintail       | American Robin          |
| Lesser Scaup           | Gray Catbird            |
| Bufflehead             | Cedar Waxwing           |
| Common Goldeneye       | Tennessee Warbler       |
| Ruddy Duck             | Yellow Warbler          |
| Osprey                 | Common Yellowthroat     |
| Eagle                  | Chipping Sparrow        |
| Red-tailed Hawk        | Clay-colored Sparrow    |
| Sora                   | Savannah Sparrow        |
| American Coot          | Song Sparrow            |
| Lesser Yellowlegs      | Lincoln’s Sparrow       |
| Spotted Sandpiper      | Swamp Sparrow           |
| Long-billed Dowitcher  | White-throated Sparrow  |
| Wilson’s Snipe         | Red-winged Blackbird    |
| Franklin’s Gull        | Yellow-headed Blackbird |
| California Gull        | Common Grackle          |
| Forster’s Tern         | Brown-headed Cowbird    |
| Black Tern             | American Goldfinch      |

#### Ann Carter



Lesser Yellowlegs

**Photo by Janice Hurlburt**

### Terwillegar Park – June 28, 2012

Seven participants, led by Michael Frost and Shirley Coulson, walked around the ponds and trails at Terwillegar Park in south-west Edmonton from 6:30 until 8:30 p.m. The weather was warm and sunny. At the ponds we saw a very large beaver (like a small whale!) and numerous muskrats and more young waterfowl.

After the ponds three of us continued through narrower trails with more grass and bushes. We turned right onto the wide trail along the river, and completed the remaining “half circle” of Terwillegar Park. An unidentified warbler near the river was most likely an American Redstart. We met with the remainder of the group back at the car park.

We had a pleasant outing, and met a few well-behaved dogs along the way. We did not see any interaction between dogs and wildlife.

We identified a total of 24 species:

- |                                 |                        |
|---------------------------------|------------------------|
| Mallard (with 7 young)          | American Crow          |
| American Wigeon                 | Rough-winged Swallow   |
| Common Goldeneye (with 4 young) | Black-capped Chickadee |
| Bufflehead                      | Grey Catbird           |
| Franklin’s Gull                 | Cedar Waxwing          |
| Downy Woodpecker                | Yellow Warbler         |
| Hairy Woodpecker                | Clay-colored Sparrow   |
| Pileated Woodpecker             | Savannah Sparrow       |
| Western Wood Peewee             | Song Sparrow           |
| Alder Flycatcher                | White-throated Sparrow |
| Least Flycatcher                | Brown-headed Cowbird   |
| Red-eyed Vireo                  | American Goldfinch     |

#### Shirley Coulson

Female Mallard Duck



**Photo by Colleen Raymond**

## A Walk at Wagner

Walking at Wagner Natural Area is a botanist's delight. Yellow lady's slipper, elephant's head, round-leaved orchid, and many more plants that are hard to find elsewhere can be seen here. This natural gem is just west of Edmonton on the Yellowhead (Highway 16) between Spruce Grove and Stony Plain. At 1.6 km west of the junction of the Yellowhead and Highway 44, turn south onto Range Road 270 (Atim Road). Then turn immediately east onto the service road and follow it to the parking area and entrance.

What makes Wagner so special? Wagner is a fen. Fens contain peat and have a high water table with slow internal drainage moving down a very gradual slope. In the case of Wagner, the groundwater is slowly moving towards Big Lake to the north. The groundwater at Wagner contains high concentrations of calcium carbonate, which precipitates out to form into a thick grey paste called marl. The concentration of minerals allows for a rich variety of plants and a unique ecosystem.

The flower stars of Wagner are the orchids. Of the 24 species of orchids known in Alberta, 16 are found at Wagner. But orchids are not the only interesting flowers there. The best time to see flowers in bloom is mid-to-late June, although blooming flowers will be found from May through August. A walk along the 1.2 km Marl Pond Trail shows off nicely the diversity and uniqueness of the plant communities. The trail is a loop that goes from a grassland into the forest, the marl ponds, and then out into the forest again.

Grassland flowers include a variety of introduced plants such as sweet clover (*Melilotus officinalis*) and various composites, buttercups (*Ranunculus* sp.), and cinquefoil (*Potentilla*). The grassland is a great place to look for various butterflies, dragonflies, and other insects. When you walk into the forest, the main flower show begins. From May to June, marsh marigold (*Caltha palustris*) carpets the ground under the trees. From mid-June on, the round-leaved orchid (*Amerorchis rotundifolia*) appears. This beautiful little orchid with pink petals and purple spots is found all along the trail. In many other places round-leaved orchid may be found occasionally, but at Wagner it is in clusters all over. A unique orchid that is also found is spotted coralroot (*Corallorhiza maculata*). Coralroot orchids absorb most of their nutrients from decaying plant matter. This means that the plants do not contain much chlorophyll and do not have visible leaves. Pale coralroot (*Corallorhiza trifida*) is also found along the trail and is often overlooked, as the flowers are small, pale green or white.

Sometimes the prettiest flowers are among the smallest. The delicate twinflower (*Linnaea borealis*) forms large mats in the moss. The twinflower is named for Linnaeus, the Swedish botanist who developed the system of modern taxonomy. Another delicate flower that is easily overlooked is bishop's-cap (*Mitella nuda*). The petals form branched antennas alternating with the sepals. The seed capsule of this plant looks like a bishop's mitre, hence its name.

The marl ponds are at the lowest point of the trail. Among the black spruce (*Picea mariana*) and Labrador tea (*Ledum groenlandicum*) there are many interesting flowers. The common butterwort (*Pinguicula vulgaris*) digests small insects on its sticky leaves and is found on the edge of the ponds. Shooting stars (*Dodecatheon pulchellum*) are beautiful flowers that look like their name. Another flower that looks like its name is the elephant's head (*Pedicularis groenlandica*). Each flower on the thick cluster looks like a tiny pink elephant's head with a curved trunk and big ears. The beautiful dark purple bog violet (*Viola nephrophylla*) is also found around the ponds. Violas are common forest flowers, as is wintergreen (*Pyrola*). There are several species of wintergreen, with pink wintergreen (*Pyrola asarifolia*) among the prettiest.

Many of the native orchid species found at Wagner are not particularly colourful or obvious. This is not the case with the yellow lady's slipper (*Cypripedium calceolus*), which forms showy clusters along the trail as you move away from the marl ponds towards the forest and grassland. The Latin name of the flower describes it well: *calceolus* means "small shoe," and *Cypris* is another name for Venus, the goddess of beauty. The calcium-rich soil of Wagner is the reason for the abundance of lady slippers. Like most native plants, orchids do not transplant well if dug up; they need the soil fungi that they grow with in order to survive.

As the Marl Pond Trail leaves the forest and returns to the grassland, the flower tour of Wagner comes to an end. In such a compact area, the variety and abundance of flowers is very special and always makes walking at Wagner a special treat at any time of the year.

### Resources

Wilkinson, Kathleen. *Wildflowers of Alberta*. 1999. University of Alberta Press. Edmonton, AB.  
www.wagnerfen.ca

**Kathleen Delaney-Mpulubusi**

## Wagner Natural Area Flowers



**Elephant's Head**



**Twin Flower**



**Pink Wintergreen**



**Yellow Lady's Slipper**



**Yellow Lady's Slipper**



**Spotted Coral Root**



**Round Leaf Orchid**



**Shooting Star**



**Common Butterwort**

*Photos by Don Delaney*

If you have any photos you'd like to share, please send them to the editor, Dawne Colwell, at [colwelld@shaw.ca](mailto:colwelld@shaw.ca)

## 2012 Snow Goose Chase



*Snow Goose Chase: Children learning about the Tofield wetlands with Ann Carter  
Photo by Gerald Romanchuk*



*Tofield wetlands  
Photo by Ann Carter*



*Photo from Artstart and Norwood Family Centre  
Enjoying nature*