

# THE PARKLAND NATURALIST



APRIL-JUNE 2012

A PUBLICATION OF THE  
EDMONTON NATURE CLUB

<http://www.edmontonnatureclub.ca>



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## Goshawk Encounter

I was returning from walking Fox Drive to Ogilvie in Whitemud Ravine and decided to take a break on the first bridge south of the ski area. Almost immediately, the young Goshawk that had been in the ravine since the fall flew towards me at about eye level, then turned up to perch in a nearby tree, pretty much saying, "So take a picture already." I moved over and was just starting to photograph the hawk when it dropped down into a large puddle in front of me. I was able to slowly move forward as it proceeded to take a bath. The bird seemed quite comfortable with my presence. Probably one of those once-in-a-lifetime encounters.

**Brian Stephens**



Photos by Brian Stephens



## The Parkland Naturalist

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<http://www.edmontonnatureclub.ca>

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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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### On the cover

Sharp-tailed Grouse by **Steve Knight**

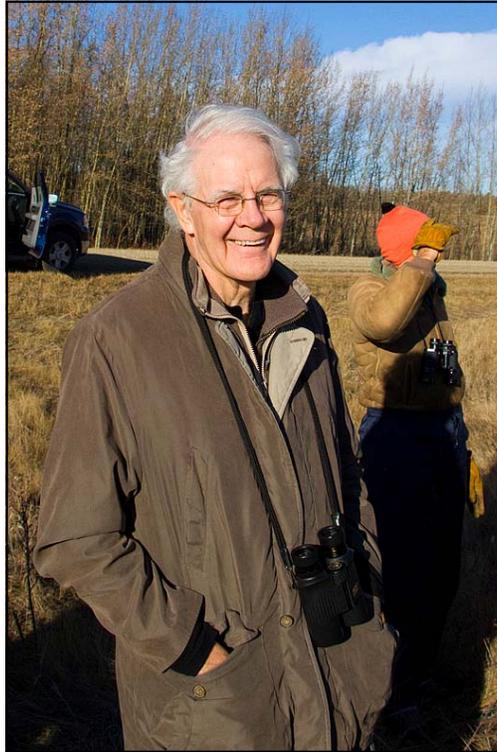
## President's Message

Bridget Stutchbury proved to be an impressive speaker at our annual banquet on March 24, 2012. Bridget gave two lectures at the University of Alberta and one at our banquet. ENC members had access to all three lectures. Thanks to Colleen Cas-sady St. Clair for arranging larger lecture rooms to accommodate our members and to Lu Carbyn for ar-ranging for Bridget to come.

The good financial health of the Ed-monton Nature Club allowed us to contribute \$5,000 to the Edmonton and Area Land Trust and to purchase two new spotting scopes with tripods for use during field trips. Marg Reine reports that since 2006 the Edmonton and Area Land Trust has acquired five parcels of land valued at \$4,633,200. Three are totally owned by the trust and two are jointly owned. Our ENC was one of six founding members of the land trust. Maps are being produced with write-ups so people can find the properties and enjoy the trails.

After the passing of Edgar T. Jones in the past year, the board decided to honour Edgar by re-naming the Conservation Award as the Edgar T. Jones Conservation Award. This would acknowledge the great

work Edgar did not only for the Edmonton Nature Club, but also for conservation in the Edmonton area and be-yond.



*Our President, Ron Ramsey*

I have not yet seen Bob Parsons' re-port on this year's Snow Goose Chase, but Bob indicated he was happy with it and that it was very successful, with many volunteers helping out with the event. Bob, as usual, spent a lot of time and effort on this event, so kudos to Bob and his helpers.

Field trips continue to be very suc-cessful, with Ann Carter leading the way. I was fortunate to attend the "Chicken Dance," or Sharp-tailed Grouse display, at Camp Wainwright this year. This event allowed me to relive childhood memories of hunting with my father and brother in south-east Saskatchewan when I was 12 years old. We didn't shoot Sharp-tailed Grouse! For anyone who has not witnessed the "Chicken Dance," I would strongly recommend it. We also had a fabulous weekend field trip going to and coming back from Wainwright.

We are sorry that Shelley Ryan-Hovind has stepped down as coordinator of the Bug and Spider Study Group. The group held a couple of field trips last year, and see-ing the children on the trips was really great. If someone could volunteer to lead even one or two trips, it would be great for the club, so please contact me if you or someone you know would be willing to do that.

Congratulations from myself and the Edmonton Nature Club to Marg Reine, who recently received the prestig-ious 2011 Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP) National Philanthropy Day Award for the Environ-ment. The award recognizes Marg's many contributions to the protection and conservation of our natural environ-ment. People such as Marg who are willing to devote their time and energy to causes they believe in really do make a difference!

Sincerely,  
**Ron Ramsey**

## Councillor Linda Sloan



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

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## National Philanthropy Day Award for the Environment Presented to Marg Reine



National Philanthropy Day, November 15, is the special day set aside to recognize and pay tribute to the great contributions that philanthropy – and those people active in the philanthropic community – have made to our lives, our communities, and our world.

In October 2011, the Association of Fundraising Professionals presented a National Philanthropy Day Award for the Environment to former Edmonton Nature Club president Marg Reine in recognition of her ongoing contributions to stewardship and conservation throughout her life. Marg is currently on the board of the Edmonton and Area Land Trust (EALT), which nominated her for the Philanthropy Day award. The picture on Marg's citation was taken at Coyote Lake, part of the Hicks property conserved by the EALT in partnership with the Nature Conservancy of Canada. Another view of Coyote Lake appears below.

Coyote Lake



## Edmonton Nature Club Conservation Award Presented to Patsy Cotterill

Following is the text of Marg Reine's award presentation at the ENC annual banquet on March 24, 2012.

It is my pleasure to present the 2011 Edmonton Nature Club Conservation Award this evening to a long-time club member, Patsy Cotterill.

Patsy is the ultimate conservationist. She has been involved in the Edmonton area for many decades, and she not only talks the talk, she walks the walk. She is committed to protect, preserve, and educate. Patsy volunteers for many different organizations, writes articles, teaches classes, speaks to all manner of audiences from universities to community groups, and guides field trips, teaching people about plants and conservation. She is always concerned with conservation in our area. She has been involved with **stewardship** – taking responsibility for land and its protection – which includes many aspects: organization and planning, data collection, interpretation, writing, and site maintenance.

These are some of her areas of involvement with local stewardship:

- For the Edmonton Nature Club, as she did for the Edmonton Natural History Club, Patsy organizes Plant Study Groups with lectures and field trips and sits on the board.
- She organizes May Species Counts for the Federation of Alberta Naturalists (Nature Alberta) and other organizations.
- For the Wagner Natural Area, her long-term commitments include serving as board secretary, writing interpretative material, guiding walks, and participating in clean-ups.
- Patsy organizes naturalization and field trips for Nisku and the Fort Saskatchewan Prairie.
- She is involved in Mill Creek thistle eradication and the Shooting Star Hill Whitemud Reserve.
- She is a member of the Hodgson Marsh Stewardship Group and Edmonton Naturalization Group, and an advisor for the Edmonton and Area Land Trust.

Patsy is also a prolific writer who has contributed to many books, including *Coyotes Still Sing in My Valley*; *Preserving our Natural Environment: Celebrating the Centennial of the Edmonton Nature Club*; *Rare Vascular Plants of Alberta*, published by the Alberta Native Plant Council; and *GO Wild*, published by the Edmonton Naturalization Group. Her articles on natural history have appeared in publications that include *Edmonton Naturalist*, *Parkland*

*Naturalist*, and *Botanical Electronic Newsletter*. She is the editor of many club newsletters, including the Stewards of Alberta's Protected Areas Association newsletter; the Edmonton Naturalization Group's *Wildflower News*; The Alberta Native Plant Council Newsletter, *Iris*; and the Wagner Natural Area newsletter. Pamphlets and books written by Patsy include *The Marl Pond Trail Guide* (for Wagner Natural Area), *Trees of Wagner Natural Area*, and *Orchids of Lakeland: A Field Guide to Lakeland Provincial Park, Provincial Recreation Area and Surrounding Region*.

In speaking out for conservation, Patsy has sent many letters to editors of newspapers and politicians both municipal and provincial. She has also reviewed and edited numerous other books and articles.

Patsy has presented speeches to the Edmonton Nature Club and its Plant Study Group, the Alberta Society of Professional Biologists, the Stewards of Alberta's Protected Areas Association, the Department of Biological Sciences at the University of Alberta, and the City of Edmonton's Master Naturalist Program. She has been a field guide and teacher for May species counts and the spring phenology study.

Patsy has received the following awards for her volunteering and stewardship:

- 2012 The Wagner Area Display Award
- 2011 Nature Alberta's Frank and Alice Harper Memorial Award, presented to people who play an important role in keeping a group on track, active, and organized and provide services that are basic to the club's continued existence
- 2004 The Parks and Protected Areas Achievement Award
- 2001 The Loran Goulden Memorial Award, presented to people who follow Loran Goulden's example by fostering amateur natural history study, contributing to our knowledge of Alberta natural history, supporting the conservation of Alberta's natural heritage, showing leadership, and sharing knowledge
- 1995 The Volunteer Appreciation Award, presented by the Edmonton Natural History Club

Patsy has been a founding member of numerous organizations, which, as many of you know, often includes the work of setting up by-laws for a group, persuading people to be on the board, and working hard to keep it going in the first years by working with others on a plan for

moving forward. Patsy has often remained involved and participated in the work of these organizations in various capacities. Some of these organizations are the Alberta Native Plant Council, Alberta Stewardship Network, Stewards of Alberta's Protected Areas Association, Edmonton Naturalization Group, and Fort Prairie and Hodgson Marsh Stewardship Groups.

Patsy worked with Alberta Environment Network on the report *Conserving Edmonton's Natural Areas* and also sat on the first City of Edmonton Natural Areas Committee, along with many other club members. This committee was instrumental in pushing for a natural areas coordinator and for follow-up on the Westworth report relative to establishing a land trust. Many years later this finally came to fruition.

Patsy is always involved in local issues, such as Edmonton's Natural Connection strategic plan, and she is well known for her drive to protect Little Mountain.

As you can see from this summary of Patsy's activities, she is certainly very involved in conservation and has a genuine interest in the protection of natural areas and their associated flora and fauna. She often spends her own money and time to fight for issues she believes in, and she keeps in touch and involved with her friends and colleagues in all aspects of friendship.

She is certainly a very deserving candidate for this award. Congratulations, Patsy.

**Marg Reine**



*Patsy (right) receives her award from Marg Reine  
Award photos by Gerald Romanchuk*



**Patsy Cotterill**  
*Photos by Dawne Colwell (l) and Cherry Dodd (r)*

## Brian Stephens Receives ENC Robert Turner Appreciation Award

At the Edmonton Nature Club's annual banquet on March 24, 2012, the Robert Turner Award was presented to Brian Stephens. The letter to ENC president Ron Ramsey nominating Brian for this award is reproduced below.

It is with great pleasure that we nominate Brian Stephens for the Edmonton Nature Club's **Robert Turner Award**.

In the years he held the position of Field Trip Coordinator, Brian organized many fun and informative field trips for the ENC. He delivered opportunities to explore a wide variety of habitats, encouraging an awareness and interest in the natural environment. Through his efforts, city nature walks as well as driving tours of outlying areas were scheduled, leaders provided, and clear, concise announcements sent to club members. He also introduced new areas to be explored.

On several occasions, Brian took on the role of trip leader. His attention to detail was obvious, with well-planned routes, appropriate timing, and central car-pooling locations. His relaxed, welcoming demeanor encouraged newcomers to join discussions and ask questions. The many trip participants benefitted from Brian's generosity in sharing his knowledge, his viewing scope, and space in his vehicle!

Brian's involvement extended to support of the Edmonton Area Land Trust. He led groups to record bird species, and he participated in the control of invasive plants in natural areas.



**Brian Stephens**  
Photo by Ann Carter



**Brian Stephens**  
Photo by Gerald Romanchuk

Brian wrote a wonderful article, "Whitemud Creek – An Appreciation," for the ENC publication *The Parkland Naturalist*. Members of the club were informed and inspired by this article, which was well researched and written from personal experiences. The desire to share his appreciation for the area and nature in general was apparent in his writing.

We believe Brian Stephens is very deserving of the Robert Turner Award for his significant contributions to the Edmonton Nature Club as Field Trip Coordinator, mentor, and role model.

Respectfully submitted,

**Ann Carter, Dawne Colwell, Heather Ronnes**



**Whitemud Ravine**

## Background of Edmonton Nature Club Awards

### Conservation Award

The Conservation Award recognizes any individual, regardless of residence or club membership, who has made a significant contribution to the knowledge, appreciation, or conservation of the natural history of the Edmonton region. This award was approved on April 5, 1988, with the first presentation in 1989. The award replaced the Loran Goulden Award, which had been transferred to the Federation of Alberta Naturalists.

### Conservation Award Recipients

1989 Cam Finlay	2000 Ray Cromie
1990 Jim Butler	2001 Pat Wishart
1991 Geoff Holroyd	2002 Barb and Jim Beck
1992 Jack Park	2003 Alison Dinwoodie
1993 Alberta Watchable Wildlife Program	2004 Not awarded
1994 Bill Wishart	2005 Kim Allen
1995 Terry Thormin	2006 Not awarded
1996 Derek Johnson	2007 Colleen Cassady St. Clair
1997 Dave Ealey	2008 Lisa and Chuck Priestley
1998 Doris and Eric Hopkins	2009 Not awarded
1999 Edgar T. Jones	2010 Elke Blodgett
	2011 Patsy Cotterill

Information provided by Jaye Lee

North Saskatchewan River



Photo by Gerald Romanchuk

### Robert Turner Appreciation Award

Robert Turner, a dentist, was one of the founding members of the Edmonton Bird Club in 1949. He became field secretary (now called field trip coordinator) of the Edmonton Bird Club in the early 1960s, and for the next 20 years he organized and led field trips, generally to Beaverhill Lake. He also was a compiler of the Edmonton Christmas Bird Count for many years and president of the Edmonton Bird Club in 1984.

Since 1976, an Appreciation Award had been given annually to a member of the Edmonton Bird Club. After Robert Turner's death, Jim Lange, who was president of the Bird Club at the time, asked Robert's wife for permission to rename this award after Robert Turner in recognition of the time and energy he had devoted to field trips and birding. She approved, and the change occurred in 1992.

Beginning in 1989, the Edmonton Natural History Club also had given an Appreciation Award for significant club contributions. The Edmonton Bird Club and The Edmonton Natural History Club amalgamated to form the Edmonton Nature Club in 2004, and since then the Robert Turner Appreciation Award has been presented by the Edmonton Nature Club at its annual banquet.

### Robert Turner Appreciation Award Recipients

1976 Bob Lister	1995 Lisa Holtorf
1977 Cy Hampson	1996 Edgar T. Jones
1978 Otto Hohn	1997 Debbie Galama
1979 Edgar T. Jones	1998 Jack Clements
1980 Bob Turner	1999 Mae Cox
1981 Kay Ball	2000 Dave Ealey
1982 Reg Heath	2001 Bob Parsons
1983 Dick Dekker	2002 Cecilia Rodriguez
1984 Peter Demulder	2003 Avard Mann
1985 Graeme Greenlee	2004 Wildbird General Store / Lu Carbyn and Jayne Carre
1986 Betty and Harry Horton	2005 Jim Lange
1987 George Evans	2006 Dolores Smithson
1988 Jack Park	2007 Dave Nadeau (posthumously)
1989 Mae Cox	2008 Marg Reine
1990 Jim Lange	2009 Gerald Romanchuk
1991 Not awarded	2010 Jaye Lee
1992 Eric Wallace	2011 Brian Stephens
1993 Lorne and Stephanie Proudfoot	
1994 Alan Hingston	

Compiled from information provided by Jim Lange and Marg Reine

## What is the Edmonton and Area Land Trust?

*The Edmonton Nature Club is a founding member.*



The Edmonton and Area Land Trust (EALT) conserves natural environments in Edmonton and the surrounding areas by securing land, protection agreements, stewardship, and education. It plays a vital and important role working with companies, individuals, and local governments to secure and steward natural areas for the use, enjoyment, and benefit of citizens today and in the future.

EALT accepts donations of property and funds, purchases land, and helps landowners establish permanent legal restrictions to protect natural habitats.

EALT works in partnership with governments and other non-profit organizations to achieve our goals. We will also work with other partners, such as communities, schools, and individual landowners, to enhance habitat protection on private land – making everyone part of the solution!

EALT was established in 2006 with a City of Edmonton endowment of \$2,500,000 plus \$275,000 start-up funds, plus \$80,000 in transition funds, and a \$500,000 anonymous donation.

There were six community founding members:

- City of Edmonton
- Edmonton Community Foundation
- Edmonton Nature Club
- Land Stewardship Centre of Canada
- Legacy Lands Conservation Society
- Urban Development Institute, Greater Edmonton Chapter

Many of our club members make donations to the Edmonton and Area Land Trust, and this last year the club as a founding member donated to the conservation stewardship endowment.

### Properties Currently in the Inventory

(To date the trust has acquired lands valued at \$4,633,200.)

All properties have been purchased with anonymous donations by persons wishing to conserve natural areas. Three are owned solely by the Edmonton and Area Land Trust, and the other two are jointly owned.

#### 1. **Hicks** (secured May 2009)

Size: 149 acres

Location: Strathcona County, south of Golden Ranches

Held jointly with partner, Nature Conservancy of Canada

### Features

Wetland and extensively forested (deciduous forest matrix)

Rolling and hummocky terrain with Aspen forests, shrub land, and numerous wetlands

Diverse wildlife

Critical source of surface and ground water

#### 2. **Glory Hills Property** (secured December 2010)

Size: ~110 acres

Location: Parkland County, north of Stony Plain

Owned by EALT

### Features

Large lake

Birch forests

Exhibits species of both boreal and parkland ecosystems

#### 3. **Golden Ranches** (secured May 2010)

Size: 3 quarters held by EALT; total secured by all partners ~1200 acres

Location: Strathcona County, on the east shore between North and South Cooking Lake

Important Partnership project

### Features

Largest working ranch in the region

~8 kms of shoreline, grasslands, and mature forests, providing a wide variety of habitat for wildlife

Key regional wildlife corridor (vital linkages to Elk Island National Park, Blackfoot Grazing Reserve, and Ministik Bird Sanctuary)

#### 4. **Ministik** (secured May 2011)

Size: 160 acres

Location: Camrose County – an extension of

Ministik Bird Sanctuary of Strathcona County

Owned by EALT

Features

Adjacent to Ministik Lake Migratory Game Bird Sanctuary, so a valuable expansion of this protected area

Many wetlands and forested areas

**5. Pipestone Creek** (secured May 2012)

Size: 104 acres

Location: Wetaskiwin County

Owned by EALT

Features

Adjacent to Pipestone Creek and near Coal Lake Tablelands Aspen forest, creek White Spruce

Heron rookery

Trail developed

**Several Other Prospects and Projects**

EALT plays an important role in providing economic, health, educational, and social benefits for the entire capital region. Check out the website, [www.ealt.ca](http://www.ealt.ca).

**Securing Lands**

To secure lands is expensive; EALT needs between \$15,000 and \$20,000 to cover legal, surveying, and fair market appraisal costs in order to issue a tax receipt to each donor. Further, money is needed for stewardship of the land in perpetuity. This often includes signage, trail maintenance, fencing, monitoring, garbage cleanup, and invasive species pulls. EALT uses volunteers extensively; however, it must also provide equipment and transportation for the volunteers. EALT also relies on corporate and individual donations yearly. EALT seeks partnerships with neighbouring counties and municipalities. Raising funds to buy land is not possible; we rely on land donation from people wishing to conserve natural areas, and issue charitable receipts for the value of the land.

All funds for the Edmonton and Area Land Trust are held at the Edmonton Community Foundation. Currently, we have the operational endowment which does not even cover the operating costs of the organization. We have a conservation endowment for stewardship, and we also have two family endowments that are specific for stewardship of the properties that we currently own. People can start a named stewardship fund of their own, taking 10 years to build it to \$10,000. We have recently devel-

oped a legacy giving program for bequests.

**Anyone can donate to any of the endowments or family funds.**

The procedure is simple. For **endowments**:

1. Send a cheque made out to the Edmonton Community Foundation and earmark it for one of the funds.
2. Tell the ECF to notify the Edmonton and Area Land Trust so we can thank you in our annual report.

For **non-endowed donations**:

Send funds directly to the Edmonton and Area Land Trust, and they will be put into our funds for acquisition costs, stewarding, or operating funds for the organization.

**All donations will receive a tax receipt.**

Money put into these funds is used only for stewarding the properties. Our short-term goal is to get the funds to \$250,000. The long-term goal is to raise these funds to \$1.5–2 million. The board feels that endowments are a prudent and financially sustainable way to look after the properties in perpetuity. The other goal is to raise the initial city endowment to \$4 million to cover more operating costs. These will be the thrust of our outreach campaigns in the future.

For further information, to see our newsletters, or to volunteer with the Edmonton and Area Land Trust, look at the website [www.ealt.ca](http://www.ealt.ca).

**Marg Reine**

Entrance pond at Hicks property



*Photo by Marg Reine*

## Parkland Plant Notes

### “Spring, the sweet spring...” (Shakespeare)

Everybody loves spring, but for naturalists particularly it is a time of rejoicing as the objects of their interest — birds, plants, reptiles, amphibians, and insects — become active and visible.

I suspect, though, that many people miss the earliest spring flowers, which occur on our native and cultivated trees and shrubs. Although few could fail to notice a male pussy willow (*Salix discolor*) that has erupted into a yellow glory of open catkins, the flowers of other species get less attention. Yet by mid-April river alders dangle reddish-yellow male catkins over rivers and creeks and everywhere in the ravines and woodlots the big fuzzy flower buds of male aspens erupt and cascade as grey sheets of catkins swaying in the wind. On valley slopes hazels are modestly sporting short yellow male catkins and sparse, tiny, red-tufted fe-

male flowers on the same branches. In the city the elms exchange their clear-cut winter profiles for a mantle of hazy brown as their flowers open, and by early May the male Manitoba maple trees droop with hanging curtains of stamens. They are all beautiful, and I often think these pristine harbingers of the season that is to come should get much more media attention, like other anniversaries do!



Female flowers of Manitoba Maple (*Acer negundo*).

How is it that aspens can produce this “grey blizzard” effect with their massed, pendulous, grey-hairy, male catkins, slanting diagonally in the breeze of a cool April day? Presumably it is because the trees grow in dense stands that all belong to a clone, a cluster of genetically identical individuals coming from one original parent. These trees are all of the same sex, and they flower and leaf out all at the same time. The long, pendent open catkins, comprised of many individual male flowers with stamens, make it easy for pollen to be scattered by the wind, and in large quantities.

Female aspen trees are in flower at the same time as the males, ready to receive the wind-borne pollen, but they are less obvious because they do not become elongated and pendent until later, when the individual fruits (capsules) that make up the catkin are fairly well devel-

oped. Then the canopy of these trees, also forming clones, takes on a greenish tinge, even before the leaves open. By the time the fruiting catkins are fully elongated and the capsules are beginning to split to allow the white-tufted seeds to emerge (late May or early June), the trees are already in full leaf, although the leaves are not fully expanded to their mature size. Aspens’ clonal nature is also the reason why, suddenly, on a day in about mid-May, the river valley becomes a canvas of fresh green, punctuated by brush strokes of dark conifers. (Admittedly, dense stands of *Caragana* bushes on the slopes contribute to its greenery too!) Balsam poplars, in the same family and genus as aspens, produce their much stouter, reddish catkins later, in May rather than in April, as do the planted hybrid poplars.

Manitoba maples are not considered to be native this far north in Alberta, where they have been planted in gardens



Opening stamens of the male flowers of Manitoba Maple.

or have escaped into moist bottomlands not far from old settlements. Native or not, I admit to a fondness for them. Like the poplars, the sexes are separate with rare exceptions. The flowers on male trees consist mostly of long, pink-stalked stamens that hang down in clusters when ripe and give the tree the appearance of being draped in yellowish-pink. The female flowers, with their greenish-yellow, antenna-like styles and tiny nascent wings (which will become part of the fruit or samara) are cute, and worth a closer look too.

I missed my grey blizzard of aspens this year because I spent most of April in Britain. I observed that, as a broad generalization, the situation there in spring is the reverse of ours. The herbaceous understory in woods, roadsides and fields is lush and green even by March, while the trees are still winter-bare and taking their time to flower and leaf out. I presume this is because, lacking our severe continental Canadian winter temperatures, British soil freezes only shallowly and temporarily, and so growth can start from the underground organs of the perennial herbs much earlier. A variety of factors, including differences in species, likely govern the phenology of the trees.

We could ask ourselves: why are our woody plants the first species to flower in the spring, when the ground cover is still winter-dreary with brown leaf litter and showing scarcely a blade of green? I speculate that it is because trees and shrubs do not need to draw water from unfrozen ground before their buds can begin to swell and growth begins. They store ample food (chiefly as starch during the winter) and water in the cells of their sapwood (xylem). When air temperatures rise, the starch turns to sucrose and dissolves in the cell water. Frozen water in the intercellular spaces melts and moves into the cells through osmosis. Movement of this sugary fluid or sap, along with cell activity, allows bud expansion to begin. Sap flow has been extensively studied in connection with the collection of maple sap for concentration as syrup in the spring. It is generally agreed that warming temperatures create positive pressure within the tree trunk, and if the trunk is punctured in any way, sap flows out to relieve this pressure. Once the trees leaf out and begin to transpire, water is drawn up from the thawed ground via the roots and the flow of sap lessens.

A good example of sap flow can be seen in poplar trees that have been invaded by the poplar borer beetle

(*Saperda calcarata*). On May 3<sup>rd</sup> I noted several aspen in Hodgson wetland area whose trunks were deeply stained by sap running from nasty-looking holes in the trunks. Piles of sawdust at the tree bases were tell-tale signs that the larvae were actively feeding in the wood. The trees won't suffer from loss of sap, but breaching of their bark defences can render them vulnerable to more serious attacks, such as from fungi. The flow does benefit some birds and insects as a temporary food source. Last spring I saw overwintering Milbert's Tortoise Shell and Mourning Cloak butterflies feeding on sap issuing from an aspen trunk where a branch had broken off.



Milbert's Tortoise Shell on leaves that are wet with sap dripping from a wounded aspen.

Not only are buds swelling and opening during April and May, but broad-leaved trees are growing new sap-conducting (xylem) cells in preparation for leaf-break, when the evaporation of water from the leaves pulls water up in these cells from roots to leaves in transpiration streams. Interestingly, conifers have tougher xylem cells that do not need to be replaced so often. This fact, and the

evergreen condition of most conifer species, means that they have somewhat different strategies for surviving winter. They too enter a flush of growth and flowering in spring. By early June our spruces and pines will be releasing pollen in such quantities that pools of rainwater can look as if they are rimmed by sulphur!

The fact that internal sources of water and food allow trees and shrubs to flower early, in the absence of obstructing leaves, permits them in turn to use wind as the means for pollinating their flowers. They risk having their flowers frozen by late frosts, and losing a year's opportunity to reproduce by seed, but against this is the advantage of having a correspondingly early seed set. For cottonwoods and balsam poplars, which grow on floodplains, seeds must be ripe and ready to germinate on the mud left after the river has flooded with the spring freshet. Indeed, an adequate supply of moisture, before the dry days of summer set in, may be important for all species with wind-distributed seed.

As I write, the blossom trees (which rely upon an adequate supply of insects for pollination) are approaching peak bloom, and in the city the dandelions are paving our roadside verges with gold. The train of flowering succession is already well on its way. It's an exciting journey!

### Patsy Cotterill



Fruiting catkins on a female aspen, showing individual fruits.

**Photos by Patsy Cotterill**

## Chasing Birds

Was that the alarm? What time IS it? Damn, it's 3:45 a.m., that can't be right. Oh yeah, the fog is starting to clear. Have to get up crazy-early, we're going to the Sharp-tailed Grouse lek. I had signed up for a special Edmonton Nature Club trip. Laurence Hoover, of the Wainwright Naturalists Society, is taking the group out to a lek. Sharp-tails, as part of their mating rituals, gather at a central spot called a lek or dancing ground. The males put on their best dance moves trying to attract the attention of the females.

The big trick of visiting a lek is that you have to get there before sunrise. Ideally, a half hour or more before sunrise. The birds start dancing early. If you approached a lek after sunrise, you'd flush all the birds and they most likely wouldn't come back. So...it all means an early start. A

*Photos by Gerald Romanchuk*



**Sharp-tailed Grouse**

very early start. Did I mention that you need to get out there early? To top things off, the lek that Laurence visits is on the Wainwright military base. To get on the base you need to go and sign in. You also have to listen to a safety orientation spiel. You end up having to meet Laurence at 4:30 a.m. so you can get to the lek before sunrise.

Once we finished with the military sign-in procedures, which seemed to take forever, Laurence led the vehicles out. We went for what seemed like an endless drive down dark, bumpy side roads. The convoy got to a fence-line, where we stopped and got out. Then it was wait, and wait some more for everybody to get all their stuff together and head down a foot path. Hope I don't sound too impatient, but I get a bit cranky that early in the morning!

The Wainwright area is pretty hilly. Lots of ups and downs on the trail. All of it is great fun, stumbling around in the dark. After a 10-minute walk, we got to the lek. It

was already starting to lighten up. We could hear the grouse moving around and then see them fly off as we all approached. The wooden blinds Laurence had arranged in a rough circle around the lek became visible. The group sorted itself out, and people crammed themselves and their gear into the small blinds.

The next 10 minutes were filled with lots of questions. How long will it take for the grouse to come back? Will they come back? Will we see them approach? The questions slowly get answered. We hear some low, cooing-type calls. Then we see the birds slowly walk back in. When they get to the centre of the lek, which has been trampled down by their dancing, they don't do much. Then all at once, as if someone has thrown a switch, the birds open their wings and start dancing. The strutting, whirling dancing is very cool, but the sounds are incredible. A mixture of stamping feet, rattling feathers, and odd vocalizations. It sounds very mechanical. Then, in complete unison, they all freeze, crouching low to the ground. They stay completely frozen for some time. What's happening? Not sure, but soon the switch is turned on again and away they go. Often when they all stop dancing and freeze, two of the birds will stop close together, head-to-head in a kind of face-off position.

At one point, the birds stopped dancing and looked alarmed. Suddenly, they all got up and flew off. We soon saw why – a Rough-legged Hawk came cruising over. It was a big relief when the birds came back within 5 minutes or so. A Rough-leg is probably not a serious threat to the grouse. They continued with their performance. By this time, the sun is throwing out enough light for some decent photography. For the first half hour to 45 minutes in the blinds, it's not really bright enough to get much shutter speed for good photos. Things were just getting really good when they all took off again. This time a Northern Harrier flew over the lek. Since a Harrier shouldn't be a real threat either, we were hoping the grouse would come back. They did, but didn't really settle into any dancing, and shortly after, we saw them fly off again. This time they flew a long way. We waited for a while longer, but the birds didn't seem to be coming back. We pried ourselves out of the blinds and were finally able to talk about what we'd seen. There were a lot of thrilled faces on the folks who hadn't been to the dancing grounds before. It was well worth the early wake-up call!

The other species of grouse in Alberta that uses leks is the highly endangered Greater Sage Grouse. They used to range as far north as Beaverhill Lake. Now, you'd have to go down to the extreme southeast part of the province around Manyberries to have a chance of seeing one. The

odds of finding them are low; by all accounts there aren't very many left. Approaching a lek to photograph them is a big no-no in Alberta.

My friend Steve Knight and I were lucky that another friend of ours knew of an accessible lek in Montana, where the birds are still fairly common. Last April, he offered to guide us down there. It turned out to be quite an adventure.

The plan was to get to the lek on the evening of our first day. We were going to set up blinds, then go stay in a motel in Big Sandy. Seemed reasonable enough, but we didn't take into account the big spring snow storm they'd had down there two days before. The side roads didn't have much gravel and were extremely muddy. Took a lot of luck and skill to get two trucks the 20 miles to the grazing reserve the lek was on. When we got onto the trail in the reserve we found out what muddy REALLY was! I'm still surprised we got both vehicles to the lek site. After

we set up some blinds, we had to make an executive decision. It seemed crazy to try to get out of there and then get back in the dark. So, we decided to camp out in the vehicles. That was fun – no food, no sleeping bag (at least for me), and worst of all, no booze!

Steve is a good friend, and a fine birder and photographer. But he has one talent I'm very envi-

ous of – the ability to fall asleep at the drop of the hat. He crawled into the back seat of his SUV, curled up into the sleeping bag he had the good foresight to bring, and promptly started snoring! In the meantime, I'm in the front seat. He wouldn't let me recline the seat very far because it hit his legs. I'm covered with a small, dirty blanket and a couple of light jackets. I froze my butt off all night listening to him snore. Didn't sleep a wink!

We thought we had to get up at 5:00 a.m. to get into the blinds. I got out of the truck just past 4:00. It was a clear, moonlit night and I could hear the grouse booming (the calls the Sage Grouse make on the lek). I got the other guys up and we got into the blinds. The birds flushed on our way in, but they did come back after a while. They

didn't really settle in very close to the blinds and the photo ops were limited. Luckily, we'd scheduled for a second morning, so we left the blinds up and drove into Havre for breakfast.

Overnight, the mud had frozen solid and it was a breeze getting out. First thing I did after breakfast was have Steve drive me to the Walmart so I could buy a sleeping bag. Second stop was the liquor store for a bottle of scotch. Slept like a baby the second night! Steve must've had to listen some serious snoring on that one.

On the second morning, we got into the blinds earlier. The grouse came in perfectly. It was an awesome morning. Nice and clear, beautiful light for photos. Fantastic to watch those big grouse pump up their air sacs and give their booming calls. Hopefully the birds in Alberta will recover and we will have a better chance to see these incredible birds closer to home.

**Gerald Romanchuk**



**Greater Sage Grouse**



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## Of Squirrels and Hawks

Being married to a birder, I have, by now, learned a few things about birds – mainly that birds fly, that they generally fly fast, and that it seems they always fly away! So, if you want to share an unusual bird sighting as it is happening, you have to be fast too. In our home, we shout “Drama in the front,” or “Drama on the driveway,” or “Drama in the back yard,” because that’s quicker than saying, “There’s a big bird out there chasing a little bird, and you’d better come quick if you want to see it.” Shouting “Drama” just saves time. Anyone who hears can drop everything to rush to the window in hopes of catching a peek and maybe a photo. Well, this true drama story is about a bird that was flying slowly and not away, but directly towards me!

It was a drab, misty March morning. I was talking on the phone to one of our recently fledged daughters and nonchalantly looking out the glass patio door when a squirrel scampered by. Without much thought, I did what any bird-loving nature person would do – I quietly opened the door, so I could kick at it! Just as I was looking down, about to swing my foot, I caught a glimpse of something else – a hawk flying out of a nearby spruce tree! The bird was large and grew larger by the millisecond; it was all hunkered down, and with slow wing flaps came closer and closer. Did hawks attack humans? If it didn’t stop soon, one of us was in big trouble – I would die of fright or the bird would die from hitting the heavy glass door! And he just kept coming. At once I thought of that series of photos Gerald Romanchuk showed at a Christmas meeting in the museum, of a Great Grey Owl headed straight for him. He said, and I quote, “If it had come any closer, I would have worried about my underwear!” As this bird kept coming, I thought, “Yikes, I know just how Gerald felt!”

Automatically, I clasped at my heart and started shouting “Drama, drama” through the phone. And then...you know how in the middle of a crisis, everything seems to pause for a moment? Suddenly, the bird was suspended in motion, all was quiet, and I thought, of all things, about how I’d read somewhere that when a person’s heart rate goes way up, she starts burning calories. I thought, “Wow, I am not even moving and I am so burning calories!” And then I glanced down and saw the squirrel. Poor little fellow was up on his hind legs, a look of sheer horror on his face. He was also clutching at his little heart, and I just knew that he was burning calories too! At that mo-



Image from Ann Carter

ment, I had my one and only feeling of deep connection with a squirrel.

One more slow wing beat closer, and then everything happened at once. The squirrel screamed a mighty scream and was gone, under the deck. The wings of the bird brushed against me as he swooped down, reaching unsuccessfully for that tiny disappearing tail, and then he righted himself and landed on the deck railing, a mere arm’s length away. Our daughter was wailing through the phone, “Mom, Mom, what’s going on?” but I couldn’t even speak. All fear left me. I was filled with awe and wonder at the size and strength and agility of this beautiful creature – it was one of those unforgettable nature experiences!

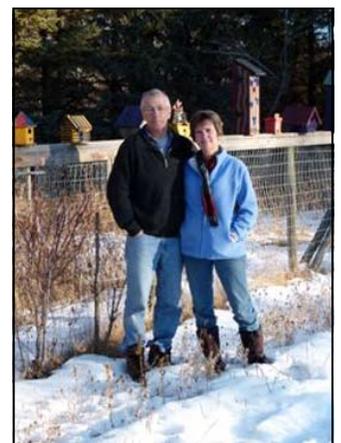
The camera was on the counter, just inside the door. I was slowly reaching in to get it when, as all birds do when you are trying to get that perfect shot, the hawk turned and flew slowly, majestically, away and out of sight.

Absolutely awesome...but there’s more. An hour or so later, a local birder, Alan, was in the yard, trying to add to his monthly bird list. Of course, I had to tell him about all the excitement. He was very interested and asked, “Are you sure that it was a hawk?” “Oh yes,” I said confidently. (In my beginner bird brain mind, I knew it wasn’t an owl, so it had to be a hawk – right?) Then he asked, “Did it have a white eye stripe?” White eye stripe? White eye stripe? I had no idea!! Alan patiently gave me a lesson on eye stripes and eye rings and all those things I knew nothing about. He was very kind, but I sensed he was really hoping the bird would return and was a bit disappointed that I hadn’t checked the eyes.

A little later, Alan had left, and Jack and our son-in-law Ron came home. I repeated the whole story to them, including that I felt like an inept birder’s wife because I’d been thinking calories when I should have been looking for eye stripes or rings.

“Mom,” Ron said, “Don’t feel bad. You should have just told him, ‘I’m not sure about the eye ring, but I’m pretty sure that he did have an earring, a nose ring, and a tattoo on his left wing!’”

**Pauline Dehaas**



Jack and Pauline Dehaas  
Photo from Pauline Dehaas

## Book Review

### ***Wesley the Owl: The Remarkable Love Story of an Owl and His Girl*, by Stacey O'Brien. Simon and Schuster/Free Press, 2008.**

The story of Wesley the Owl begins when a young lab assistant at Caltech is asked to adopt a four-day-old owlet who fell and suffered nerve damage in a wing. Stacey O'Brien agrees reluctantly, but quickly falls for the tiny fluff ball and names him Wesley. This begins their fascinating relationship.

For 19 years, Stacey cares for and studies Wesley, with both a scientist's eye and the love of a parent. Their close relationship allowed her to gain insights into Barn Owl behaviour, intelligence, instincts, habits, communication, and emotions. The story is well told and quite funny as the author relays stories about Wesley's progression from a nestling, to an awkward juvenile learning to fly, to an alpha male who chases her potential boyfriends away. The damage to his wing meant he would never have the ability to properly fly for extended periods or to hunt for himself, much less a mate or offspring. He is totally dependent on Stacey to provide him with food, and over his lifetime that amounted to 28,000 mice.

The book also tells the story of the author's professional life and the daily events of working with birds. Stacey O'Brien brings readers into Caltech, a renowned research facility in California where owls fly freely in the halls and quirky, brilliant scientists study the birds they love. In a remarkable turn of events, when Stacey becomes extremely ill with a

brain tumour, the devotion and loyalty of her owl gives her the determination to recover.

The book includes tidbits of owl information that I was a bit skeptical about, so I did some research, and they turned out to be true. One example is that when a Barn Owl's mate dies, the survivor becomes extremely depressed and wills itself to die. The mate enters a catatonic state and dies much more quickly than if it had starved to death. Another example is Stacey's claim that Wesley had facial expressions and she could tell when he was upset, embarrassed, angry, sulking, or being mischievous. It turns out that Barn Owls do have tiny muscles that can change the expressions on their faces. They use these facial expressions to communicate to their mates and offspring. Wesley used his expressions to communicate with Stacey.



Photo by Ann Carter

The book is punctuated with great photos of Wesley posing, grooming, flying, pouting, cuddling with Stacey, admiring himself in the mirror, swimming, and defending Stacey against potential suitors and threats. Stacey O'Brien's story of her relationship with her owl is a great read for any animal lovers, owl lovers, bird lovers, or those looking for a few good laughs and maybe a few tears. *Wesley the Owl* is an interesting and entertaining book, and is sure to pull at the heart strings. Ken Kauffman was quoted as saying, "Read this book and you will never see owls, or humans, in the same light again." I second his sentiments.

**James Fox**

## Masters of Migration: The Monarchs Make Their Way North

The Monarch Butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*) is a spectacular large orange butterfly with black wing veins and margins. It has a wing span of 9–10 cm and can be easily identified on the wing by its unique flight pattern. Monarchs' wings are specialized for their long migratory trips. Their forewings are longer than those of most butterfly species but are narrowed at the tips to take advantage of warm updrafts and upper-level winds. Monarchs can often be seen high above the tree tops, and sometimes use soaring to minimize energy in flight. Unless it is a cool, sunny morning, Monarchs are very difficult to catch.

Monarchs are known for their yearly migration from overwintering sites in Mexico and California to breeding areas in the northern states and southern Canadian provinces. On average, they fly a remarkable 80–160 km (50–100 miles) daily for up to 5,000 km (3,000 miles). A well-known overwintering site is in the Sierra Madre Mountains in Mexico, where millions of monarchs cluster on mountain conifers to overwinter. Two groups of Monarchs make it to Canada, the eastern and western Monarchs. They are distinct because they have two isolated overwintering sites. The eastern population travels from Mexico up into central North America east of the continental divide, while the western population travels from coastal California and stays on the west side of the divide.

The recent sightings of this beautiful butterfly in Edmonton are a hot topic among naturalists and entomologists. It is rare for Monarchs to be found this far north, and the large numbers of Monarchs observed during the first week in June are unprecedented. The last known influx of Monarchs to Alberta was in 2007, yet their numbers were nothing like what we are experiencing this year, especially in Edmonton. Theories as to why this rare influx of Monarchs has made it so far north in Alberta include optimal overwintering conditions and good survival, a mild winter in North America, and strong prevailing winds from the south.

All butterflies have a complete life cycle including egg, larva, pupa, and adult. In March and April, Monarchs leave their southern wintering sites and fly north to suitable breeding grounds. After breeding, females will carry up to 400 viable eggs as they search for milkweed plants (*Asclepias* sp.) on which to deposit the eggs. Milkweed is the host plant for the larvae or caterpillars, and this species is essential in normal Monarch development. Females lay eggs singly on the leaves of host plants; if milkweeds are in short supply, large congregations of caterpillars can occur.

Small yellow, white, and black striped caterpillars emerge and begin feeding approximately 3–4 days after egg deposition. Caterpillars feed for another 10–14 days before pupating; the process of encasing themselves in a pupal case is called eclosion. The pupal stage involves 10–14 days of development before an adult Monarch emerges. Adult Monarchs often feed at nectar-producing flowers of plants and shrubs to secure energy for reproduction and fuel for the long distances they must travel. Because the journey is too long for a single generation to complete, Monarchs lay their eggs and die, leaving their offspring to carry on the migration north. It is the second, third, or sometimes fourth generation of Monarchs that will reach the northern breeding sites. The Monarchs born at these northernmost locations must feed and store up fat reserves sufficient to sustain them during their flight back to warmer overwintering sites. Upon arriving in Mexico and California, they enter a torpid phase until the following spring.

It is still not well understood how Monarchs know when to begin their migration, nor how they navigate such great distances. Scientists have speculated that Monarchs use one or several forms of compasses such as earth's magnetic fields or sun orientation, yet to this day, it is still a mystery how an insect that is two or three generations displaced from its "grandparent" inherits the knowledge that allows it to find its way to a specific overwintering site where it has never been before.

Milkweed is an essential larval host plant for Monarchs, and if milkweed is not available and eggs are placed on other plants, the Monarch caterpillars are often malformed. Milkweed is considered an undesirable weed in parts of Canada and included in provincial noxious weed acts because it is considered to be toxic to livestock. The same compounds that make cattle sick confer a special defence to adult Monarchs, making them bitter and distasteful to many predators. The Monarch's bold coloration is called "aposematic marking" and advertises the butterfly as inedible.

Expanding agricultural areas in Canada often involves the conversion of natural areas to croplands and leads to the widespread use of herbicides that reduce amounts of native *Asclepias* sp. Two species of milkweed are found this far north in Alberta, *A. speciosa* (Showy Milkweed) and *A. ovalifolia* (Low Milkweed). Showy Milkweed is the preferred host plant of larvae in Alberta. Unfortunately, as of the last plant survey from 2005–2010, the Alberta Biodiversity Monitoring Institute documented only one small isolated area of Showy Milkweed in Northern Alberta. This is bad news for the Monarchs, as well as for those

who enjoy seeing them.

Monarch Watch is an international organization committed to studying and conserving Monarch butterflies and their essential habitats. The people at Monarch Watch are not only concerned about the Monarchs' lost habitat and larval host plants in the northern breeding sites; they are also expressing great concern and introducing legislation for the conservation of Monarchs' overwintering habitats. Continual development and expanding agricultural practices in both breeding and overwintering sites often cause declines of Monarch populations. Although Monarchs are adaptable and extremely resilient, we need to ensure their access to suitable nectar-producing plants for adult butterfly feeding and the larval host plants essential to complete their life cycle. In addition to being susceptible to human interference, Monarchs also have to overcome specialized predators, parasites, and other environmental factors.

Planting butterfly gardens to provide food for larvae and adults will help the Monarch's current situation. Adult Monarchs need to feed frequently as they travel, and in Alberta they seek out plants such as lilacs, purple coneflower, asters, and goldenrods for their profuse flowers and nectar supplies and, of course, the milkweeds for egg deposition. We can help Monarchs complete their life cycle by planting larval host plants, such as butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*). Although developing Monarch caterpillars and a small handful of larvae can easily strip most of the leaves from a plant, the fluffy milkweed seeds often can be harvested for planting the next year. In addition to helping the Monarch, you will be encouraging other species of butterflies, moths, and hummingbirds to visit your garden, thereby increasing its floral and faunal diversity and your enjoyment of the mysterious process of migration.

For more information about Monarch conservation and developing and registering a Monarch Waystation, go to [www.monarchwatch.org/waystations/](http://www.monarchwatch.org/waystations/).

## Shelley Ryan-Hovind

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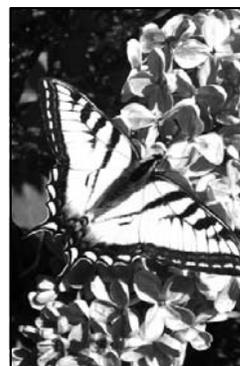
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Monarch second instar larva feeding on Scarlet Milkweed (*Asclepias curassivica*).



Adult female nectaring on Common Lilac (*Syringa vulgaris*).



Canadian Tiger Swallowtail (*Papilio canadensis*), often mistaken for a Monarch.

**Photos by Shelley Ryan-Hovind  
taken at Devonian Gardens**

## Watching Peregrines at Cooking Lake

The very best place to see migrating Peregrine Falcons in action used to be Beaverhill Lake. Starting in 1965, I spent four weeks there each spring and fall to collect data on hunting methods and success rates, which were subsequently published in the *Canadian Field-Naturalist* and the *Journal of Zoology*. After 2009, when this world-class Ramsar wetland had practically dried up, I switched my field observations to Cooking Lake. It was a lot closer to Edmonton, saving many kilometres of driving, and during May and September peregrine sightings could be quite common. The following anecdotes describe some of the most noteworthy hunting behaviour I recorded.

On September 29, 2009, a dozen or so falcons approached close enough to identify them as either grey-blue adults or brownish young of the year. One of the latter, a smallish male, gave a fascinating demonstration of the problems immature peregrines encounter in learning their trade.

I found him sitting on a shoreline stone in the late afternoon, and I watched him through binoculars for more than an hour until he took wing of his own accord. He made several fast flights over the lake to meet flocks of ducks that promptly dropped out of the way and into the water. After several missed chances, he came back to the shore at great speed and overtook some shovelers. When one of them splashed down, the falcon circled back and began a long series of swoops at the swimming duck, which each time kicked up a spray of water and tried to dive. Attracted by the action, three large gulls approached, alighting nearby, and one of them started to peck at the duck until it stopped moving.

Ignoring the gull, the falcon tried again and again to retrieve the floating prey, hovering over it with dangling claws. He twice landed on a shoreline stone for a brief rest, then resumed his attempts. The drama ended with the arrival of a Bald Eagle, which picked up the carcass without stopping.

The frustrated peregrine retreated to a shoreline stone some distance away. Sitting on a boulder myself, I kept him in the glasses, and eventually he again flew out over the lake, swooping at ducks rising from the shallows, but they at once dropped back into deeper water. The falcon then climbed with furious wingbeats to overtake a gull and seize it from below and behind. Holding on, he fluttered steeply down. However, unable to carry his catch to dry land, he released it just above the water. Regaining altitude, he now left the area and headed for the opposite shore of the lake. Far away, he descended like a meteor and vanished from view. Such long distance attacks are more typical of adult peregrines.



Photo by Dick Dekker

On May 26, my last spring visit of 2010, with a cool east wind blowing, there were several thousand Red-necked Phalaropes scattered over the wide expanse of water of the lake's northeast bay. When a flock flushed from the surface, I aimed the binoculars just in time to see them overtaken by an adult peregrine, which seized its prey at once and carried it back to shore. Later that afternoon, another falcon, a dark immature, launched half a dozen attacks far out over the water, stooping at the rising phalaropes but each time missing the target. Giving up, the falcon flew away and soared high, drifting downwind over the lake and dwindling to a tiny speck in the glasses. Eventually, after many minutes, he came back upwind, his wings set and passing high overhead like a black trident. I was hoping that he would make his next attack in good view, but he flew on, gradually descending and boosting his speed with a burst of wingbeats until he dropped out of sight far away.

During the fall of 2011, peregrines were less common than in the previous year, but I happened to see something I had never seen before. An adult peregrine, which I had watched for quite a while, took off from a shoreline stone and climbed high and far over the lake to intercept a lone bird.

Pursuing it on a downward course back to the land, the

falcon had time to put in three or four swoops that missed the dodging target, which turned out to be a magpie. Upon reaching the shore, it managed to drop into the safety of bushes. This was the first time ever that I have seen a peregrine hunt this wily land bird.

### Dick Dekker

*For further details, see Dick Dekker's 2009 book, Hunting Tactics of Peregrines and Other Falcons. It is illustrated with photos and paintings, and available from the Nature Alberta book store, or from Hancock House Publishers, Surrey, BC.*



Futile Chase (Peregrine and Pintail Ducks) by Dick Dekker

## The eagles are back, but...

After successfully fledging two youngsters in each of 2009 and 2010, and three in 2011 (see photo), a pair of Bald Eagles are again using the same nest in a tall river bank poplar on the eastern boundary of Edmonton. On May 25, 2012, a binocular check of the nest revealed that there were at least two chicks, which occasionally could be seen to pop up their heads. Over the years, the adult eagles, which used to be very shy, have become quite tolerant of hikers using a nearby hiking trail built by Strathcona County in 2009. As explained in the previous *Parkland Naturalist*, river bank erosion has necessitated a major reconstruction of the trail. In a recent and much appreciated letter to me, county officials wrote that the work will be delayed until late summer so as to limit possible disturbance to the nesting eagles. The trail will then be rerouted away from the poplar grove that contains the eagle nest, and “Dogs-on-Leash” signs will be placed at prominent points along the hiking trail.

Watching the nest for several hours on June 4 and 11, I got the impression that the two eaglets were doing well, and both days, while the adult female was perched in the nest tree, the male made a brief appearance. But on July 5, the nest was empty. Had something happened? In 2010 and 2011, the eaglets did not fledge until well into the third week of July. Disturbance to the vegetation and dropped cigarette butts indicated that people had been standing right below the nest tree.

### Dick Dekker



Photo by Bob van Essen

## My Infatuation with the Ruffed Grouse

Years ago, as a young new arrival from the Netherlands, I set out to investigate my adopted country, i.e., THE CANADIAN WILDERNESS. It was on one of those outings with a fellow birder that I stopped and said, "Listen, do you hear that?"

"Hear what?" he replied.

"That farmer in the distance. It seems like he has troubles getting his tractor started."

The guy laughed. "What you hear is a Ruffed Grouse drumming."

Of course, as a birder I knew what a Ruffed Grouse looked like from mounted specimens, but had never seen one in real life. That was going to change in the years to come.

Every spring when I roamed the woods I tried to find that elusive drummer. Mid-April is the time, and when the Ruffed Grouse cycle is not at a low point, I would hear that THUMP, THUMP, THUMP, WHirrrrrrrrrrr.

Trying to locate that exact spot, however, is not simple. The sound is of a very low frequency, and you never know how far or how close you are to the bird. In addition, the leaves are not out that early in the year, so the under-story of the forest is actually quite open, specifically from the viewpoint of the grouse. In other words, he can see you coming, and he vanishes.

What I did was to make frequent stops, sit somewhere, and listen for drumming. If I heard it, I would take a bearing on the direction of the sound and slowly and quietly work my way to that spot, which wasn't easy to do on the dry, noisy, corn-flaky leaves. Every time I heard drumming I took a few steps and stopped to wait for the next "drum-roll." This could take several hours. When I heard no more drumming for 15–20 minutes, I knew the grouse had noticed me again.

Over time I learned to look for a dead tree or other suitable log lying on the ground with a substantial quantity of fresh droppings on either side. That's when I knew I had hit the jackpot. Occasionally I saw the grouse sneaking away. In my quest to photograph the grouse, I then placed a well camouflaged blind not too close to the log and left things alone for a few days so the grouse could get used to this intrusion in his world.

So far, so good. Now the day has come to use the set-up and take photographs, right? Easier said than done. I sneaked into the blind several times, but only heard a grouse drumming elsewhere.

The question then arises, does a male grouse use more than one log? The answer to that is yes. Eventually I found I had to go into the blind before first light, which isn't easy in a dark forest.

Now, the waiting game begins. I sit in the cramped confinement of the blind (not much more than a cubic yard), unable

to see what is going on around me. It is still dark, but hearing the forest awakening is a unique experience in itself. The Great Horned Owls are hooting to each other. I know their nest, not too far from here. It has two young ones in it. Pileated Woodpeckers are "ratatating" on their favorite resonating branches. By the sound of it, there is another pair a bit further south from me. Now and then I peek through one of the ½" square holes to see if the grouse is coming. On previous visits, I was startled out of a half slumber when he arrived without my knowledge and started his wing-beating drumming.

In the meantime, it is getting lighter, though not light enough for photography yet, so I wait and watch. Now comes the exciting part of the operation.

On a successful day, the grouse comes quietly sneaking in and I spot him. He hops onto his log and sits there for a while, preening and looking very content. Now he takes a firm grip on the rough bark surface and starts to drum, THUMP, THUMP, THUMP, WHirrrrrrrrr. When you are really lucky (which is not that often), he fans out his beautiful tail to almost a half circle, raises his ruff to the point where his head almost disappears, and struts back and forth on the log. He does this when a female approaches, attracted by the sound of his drumming. He starts to shake his ruff and make hissing sounds, jumps off the log, and in a short running burst of great excitement disappears from my sight. This, after all, is what it is all about in the world of the Ruffed Grouse!

Half an hour later, when nothing else happens, I crawl out of my hiding place stiff and cold, but with a feeling of great fulfillment to have been able to witness this event in the privacy of nature.

**Ludo Bogaert**

### *Ruffed Grouse*



*Photo by Ludo Bogaert*

## Field Trip Reports

### NW of Bruderheim Natural Area Survey June 24, 2012

We joined many others surveying plants, bugs, and birds at this natural area, which was affected by fire in 2009. Four of us were actively counting birds. We counted 31 species, two of which, as noted below, were fly-over birds.

One highlight was finding a Lark Sparrow with nesting material. A pair of Lark Sparrows were seen in a different location, so it is likely that the area has two pairs of Lark Sparrows.

While pursuing a Purple Finch photo op, Dawne Colwell came across a pair of Black-backed Woodpeckers. They were close together on the same tree and moved to subsequent trees together.

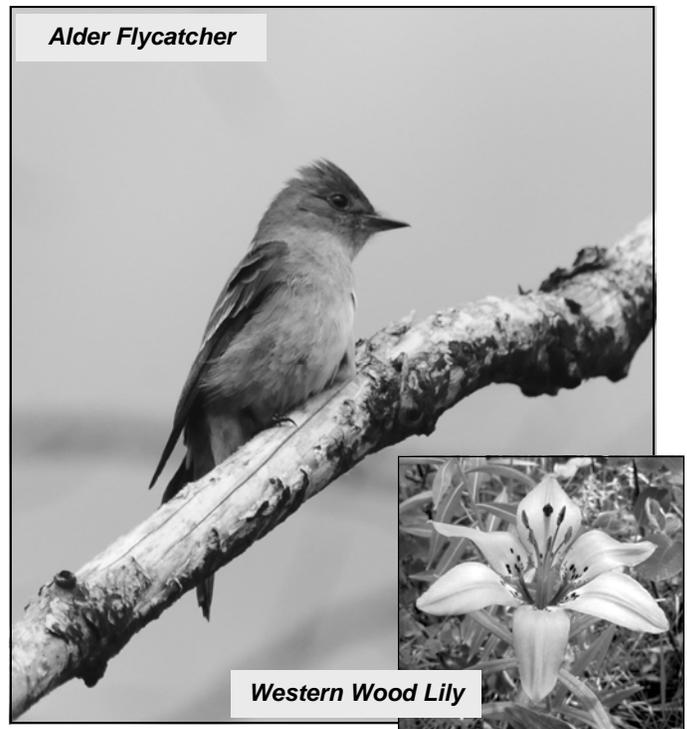
We also came across a very odd situation: early in the day we thought we had a Mourning Warbler, but something was not quite right about the song. When we returned later in the afternoon, the same song was coming from the same area, so we spent time trying to locate the bird to confirm ID. The call was very much like Sibley's songs 3\_MB. We had a White-throated Sparrow calling and visible in the open. The two calls were synchronized, first the "Mourning Warbler," then the White-throated. To our surprise, when the White-throated moved, so did the "Mourning Warbler." Turned out the White-throated Sparrow was making both calls in succession, first the song similar to the Mourning Warbler's, followed immediately by its normal song. I don't know if anyone has encountered this elsewhere. The species list follows:

American White Pelican, 3 (fly-over)	Tree Swallow, 2
Red-tailed Hawk, 3	Black-capped Chickadee, 1
Merlin, 1	House Wren, 19
Franklin's Gull, 6 (fly-over)	Mountain Bluebird, 1
Mourning Dove, 1	American Robin, 6
Northern [Yellow-shafted] Flicker, 1	Hermit Thrush, 3
Black-backed Woodpecker, 2	Cedar Waxwing, 17
Pileated Woodpecker, 1	Yellow Warbler, 6
Western Wood-Pewee, 9	Chipping Sparrow, 4
Alder Flycatcher, 3	Clay-colored Sparrow, 8
Least Flycatcher, 10	Lark Sparrow, 3
Eastern Kingbird, 2	White-throated Sparrow, 13
Warbling Vireo, 1	Dark-eyed [Slate-colored] Junco, 8
Red-eyed Vireo, 3	Brown-headed Cowbird, 4
Common Raven, 1	Purple Finch, 1
	American Goldfinch, 2

**Brian Stephens**

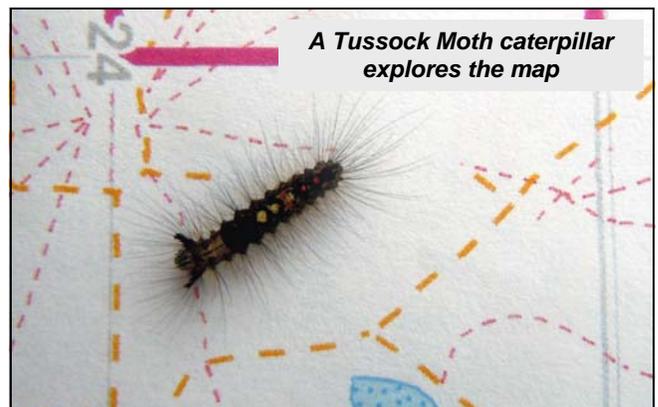


*Lark Sparrow*



*Alder Flycatcher*

*Western Wood Lily*



*A Tussock Moth caterpillar explores the map*

*Photos by Dawne Colwell taken on the field trip*

## Field Trip Reports

### ENC Piping Plover Trip, June 23, 2012

A group of 15 went on the first Edmonton Nature Club Piping Plover Trip. Thanks to Dave, our Fish and Wildlife Guide, who is a wealth of knowledge and was more than happy to teach us a few things about Piping Plovers.

We spent a couple of hours on the beach, watching the plovers, counting them, and removing exclosures from the nests that had already hatched. Our final tally was 10 adult plovers and 5 chicks, though Dave says he is pretty sure we missed a few chicks. When they aren't motor-ing along the beach, they look like rocks, so they are very easy to miss. An interesting fact about Piping Plovers is that when they hatch they are ready to run and are able to feed themselves, so it is the males' job to keep predators away. The females stick around for a little bit, but then head back south.

The plovers were a life bird for 10 out of 15 participants. Please don't ask where the beach is; we all signed a non-disclosure agreement.

Our species list for the day comprised the following 51 birds:

Great Blue Heron	Eastern Phoebe
Mallard	Eastern Kingbird
Northern Pintail	Red-eyed Vireo
Gadwall	Black-billed Magpie
American Wigeon	American Crow
Northern Shoveler	Common Raven
Blue-winged Teal	Tree Swallow
Lesser Scaup	Barn Swallow
Redhead	Cliff Swallow
Common Goldeneye	Black-capped Chickadee
Ruddy Duck	House Wren
Red-tailed Hawk	American Robin
American Kestrel	European Starling
Sora	Cedar Waxwing
American Coot	Yellow Warbler
Piping Plover	Clay-colored Sparrow
Killdeer	Vesper Sparrow
American Avocet	Savannah Sparrow
Spotted Sandpiper	Red-winged Blackbird
Wilson's Phalarope	Western Meadowlark
Franklin's Gull	Brewer's Blackbird
Mourning Dove	Brown-headed Cowbird
Northern Flicker	American Goldfinch
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	Pileated Woodpecker
	Least Flycatcher
	Ovenbird
	Common Yellowthroat

### James Fox



*Piping Plover nest*



*Piping Plover Photos by Gerald Romanchuk*



*American Avocet Photo by Dawne Colwell*

## Field Trip Reports

### ENC Century Day at Elk Island, June 9, 2012

The Edmonton Nature Club ran its annual “Century Day” at Elk Island National Park on Saturday, June 9. Eighteen of us started at 7:00 a.m., hoping to find at least 100 species.

The first piece of luck was the weather; despite forecasts calling for rain, we had a nice sunny morning and early afternoon. The clouds didn’t roll in until about 2:30. Even then, we didn’t get a whole lot of rain.

Things were almost too easy, We hit and passed 100 birds around 2:00. The usual scenario is a mad scramble looking for a couple of extra birds late in the afternoon when everyone has pretty much run out of gas. We also got over the 100 mark staying inside the park. Often we have to run one of the perimeter roads to pick up a few extras. We ended up doing that and hit a grand total of 110. The number is the result of a particularly sharp-eyed and sharp-eared group.

There were some notable misses – no Downy Woodpecker, neither of the nuthatches, no Swainson’s Thrush.

We also had some nice surprises. A pair of Trumpeter Swans made a low fly-by when we were birding the Bison Loop Road, of all places. We got everyone on a very persistently singing Le Conte’s Sparrow. We saw a pair of Black-necked Stilts at Tawayik Lake, maybe only the second record at the park since Martin Sharp recorded them there a few years ago.

We did really well on warblers, picking up 9 species, including Black-and-white, Tennessee, Mourning, Cape May, and Chestnut-sided. Sparrows, too – we found 10 of them, though 5 of us had to make a late afternoon trip to the campground fen to find the Nelson’s Sparrow.

Non-avian highlights included a Monarch Butterfly seen near the beach at Astotin Lake. Monarchs are pretty rare around here, though there have been a few scattered reports this week from the Edmonton area. We also heard a Boreal Toad calling at Tawayik Lake.

**Gerald Romanchuk**



A complete bird list compiled by Ann Carter for eBird follows.

Canada Goose	Least Flycatcher
Trumpeter Swan	Eastern Phoebe
Gadwall	Great Crested Flycatcher
American Wigeon	Eastern Kingbird
Mallard	Blue-headed Vireo
Blue-winged Teal	Warbling Vireo
Northern Shoveler	Red-eyed Vireo
Northern Pintail	Blue Jay
Green-winged Teal	Black-billed Magpie
Canvasback	American Crow
Redhead	Common Raven
Ring-necked Duck	Purple Martin
Lesser Scaup	Tree Swallow
Bufflehead	Barn Swallow
Common Goldeneye	Black-capped Chickadee
Barrow’s Goldeneye	Boreal Chickadee
Hooded Merganser	House Wren
Common Merganser	Marsh Wren
Ruddy Duck	Golden-crowned Kinglet
Ruffed Grouse	Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Common Loon	Mountain Bluebird
Pied-billed Grebe	Veery
Horned Grebe	Hermit Thrush
Red-necked Grebe	American Robin
Eared Grebe	Gray Catbird
Western Grebe	European Starling
Double-crested Cormorant	Cedar Waxwing
American White Pelican	Ovenbird
Great Blue Heron	Black-and-white Warbler
Cooper’s Hawk	Tennessee Warbler
Broad-winged Hawk	Mourning Warbler
Red-tailed Hawk	Common Yellowthroat
American Kestrel	Cape May Warbler
Merlin	Yellow Warbler
Sora	Chestnut-sided Warbler
American Coot	Yellow-rumped Warbler
Killdeer	Chipping Sparrow
Black-necked Stilt	Clay-colored Sparrow
American Avocet	Savannah Sparrow
Spotted Sandpiper	Le Conte’s Sparrow
Solitary Sandpiper	Nelson’s Sparrow
Lesser Yellowlegs	Song Sparrow
Wilson’s Snipe	Lincoln’s Sparrow
Wilson’s Phalarope	Swamp Sparrow
Franklin’s Gull	White-throated Sparrow
Ring-billed Gull	Dark-eyed Junco
Black Tern	Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Rock Pigeon	Red-winged Blackbird
Mourning Dove	Yellow-headed Blackbird
Belted Kingfisher	Common Grackle
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	Brown-headed Cowbird
Hairy Woodpecker	Baltimore Oriole
Northern Flicker	Pine Siskin
Western Wood-Pewee	American Goldfinch
Alder Flycatcher	House Sparrow

**Trumpeter Swan**  
**Photo by Gerald Romanchuk**

## Field Trip Reports

### ENC City Nature Walks, Hawrelak Park, June 5, 2012

Our group of 11 participants strolled around the lake as the rain showers mostly avoided the area. Close views of the waterfowl allowed us to see them in great detail. We had quite a conversation with a friendly Goldeneye and enjoyed the antics of the many ducklings. There was a lot of discussion about bird behaviour and managing wild-life in the park. Highlights included Hooded Merganser, Northern Shoveler, Horned Grebe, and the many Common Goldeneye ducklings.

Our complete list and adult bird count follows.

Horned Grebe, 1	Ring-billed Gull, many
Canada Goose, 45	Rock Dove, 4
American Wigeon, 8	Black-billed Magpie, 10
Mallard, 25	American Crow, 7
Blue-winged Teal, 6	Tree Swallow, 2
Northern Shoveler, 2	Bank Swallow, 8
Lesser Scaup, 50	Cedar Waxwing, 2
Common Goldeneye, 14	Yellow Warbler, 1
Hooded Merganser, 1	Chipping Sparrow, 1
American Coot, 1	Brown-headed Cowbird, 2

**Ann Carter and John Jaworski**

### Monarch Butterfly



Photo by Janice Hurlburt

### Horned Grebe



Photo by Gerald Romanchuk

### "Sharp-tailed Grouse Dance" ENC Wainwright Geese and Grouse Field Trip, April 21-22, 2012



Photo by Gerald Romanchuk

## Field Trip Reports

### ENC Trip to Cold Lake, June 1–3, 2012

Ten of us ventured to Cold Lake for a weekend of Boreal forest birding. Weather was mixed – beautiful Friday night, Saturday morning, and Sunday afternoon, but rainy, windy, and cool Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning. We birded regardless, guided indefatigably through the rain by Gerald for a good set of regional specialties. We covered the Provincial Park, Primrose Lake Road, Fish Hatchery Road, English Bay, and Kinsoo Beach. Most of us also checked out other spots en route to and from Cold Lake, but this report refers only to species seen in the Cold Lake area.

Thanks to all participants for their good humour through the rain and to Gerald for his guiding, which gave a number of us new life birds.

Highlights included Caspian Tern, Three-toed Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Western Tanager, Winter Wren, and Sedge Wren. Also, of course, the warblers: Tennessee, Nashville, Yellow, Chestnut-sided, Magnolia, Cape May, Yellow-rumped, Black-throated Green, Blackburnian, Palm, Bay-breasted, Black-and-white, American Redstart, Ovenbird, Mourning, Common Yellowthroat, and Canada.

We tallied 110 species, including 17 kinds of warblers, all listed in the table to the right.

**Martin Sharp and Ann Carter**

**Sora**



**Photo by Gerald Romanchuk**

Common Loon	Least Flycatcher
Horned Grebe	Eastern Phoebe
Red-necked Grebe	Blue-headed Vireo
Eared Grebe	Red-eyed Vireo
Western Grebe	Gray Jay
American White Pelican	Blue Jay
Double-crested Cormorant	Black-billed Magpie
Great Blue Heron	American Crow
Canada Goose	Common Raven
Gadwall	Purple Martin
American Wigeon	Tree Swallow
Mallard	Barn Swallow
Blue-winged Teal	Black-capped Chickadee
Northern Shoveler	Boreal Chickadee
Green-winged Teal	White-breasted Nuthatch
Canvasback	Brown Creeper
Redhead	Winter Wren
Ring-necked Duck	Sedge Wren
Lesser Scaup	Golden-crowned Kinglet
Bufflehead	Swainson's Thrush
Common Goldeneye	Hermit Thrush
Red-breasted Merganser	American Robin
Common Merganser	European Starling
Osprey	Cedar Waxwing
Northern Harrier	Tennessee Warbler
Red-tailed Hawk	Nashville Warbler
American Kestrel	Yellow Warbler
Sora	Chestnut-sided Warbler
American Coot	Magnolia Warbler
Killdeer	Cape May Warbler
Solitary Sandpiper	Yellow-rumped Warbler
Spotted Sandpiper	Black-throated Green Warbler
Sanderling	Blackburnian Warbler
Wilson's Snipe	Palm Warbler
Franklin's Gull	Bay-breasted Warbler
Bonaparte's Gull	Black-and-white Warbler
Ring-billed Gull	American Redstart
California Gull	Ovenbird
Herring Gull	Mourning Warbler
Caspian Tern	Common Yellowthroat
Common Tern	Canada Warbler
Forster's Tern	Western Tanager
Black Tern	Chipping Sparrow
Rock Dove	Clay-coloured Sparrow
Common Nighthawk	Le Conte's Sparrow
Downy Woodpecker	Song Sparrow
Hairy Woodpecker	Lincoln's Sparrow
Three-toed Woodpecker	Swamp Sparrow
Northern Flicker	White-throated Sparrow
Pileated Woodpecker	Red-winged Blackbird
Olive-sided Flycatcher	Yellow-headed Blackbird
Western Wood-Pewee	Brown-headed Cowbird
Yellow-bellied Flycatcher	Pine Siskin
Alder Flycatcher	American Goldfinch
Willow Flycatcher	House Sparrow

## Field Trip Reports

### ENC City Nature Walk, Hermitage Park, May 30, 2012

We had a large group of about 35 birders. Rain clouds looked a little threatening, but the weather cleared up and we had a very pleasant evening.

The birding was fairly routine; migration seems to be pretty much over with, so the local breeders were all settling in. We had quite a few newer birders out. Common species are always more interesting when we revisit them through new eyes!

A group of 7 pelicans was a big hit. A Gray Catbird that popped up long enough for everyone to see it was a bonus. I had a hard time dragging folks away from watching a Mallard shepherd her ducklings around.

We saw 23 species listed below.

Canada Goose	House Wren
Mallard	American Robin
Lesser Scaup	Gray Catbird
Red-necked Grebe	Cedar Waxwing
American White Pelican	Yellow Warbler
Franklin's Gull	Clay-colored Sparrow
Ring-billed Gull	Savannah Sparrow
California Gull	Song Sparrow
Alder Flycatcher	Red-winged Blackbird
Black-billed Magpie	Brown-headed Cowbird
American Crow	American Goldfinch
	House Sparrow

**Gerald Romanchuk**

*American White Pelican*



*Photo by Gerald Romanchuk*

*Golden-crowned Kinglet*



*Photo by Steve Knight*

### ENC City Nature Walk, Whitemud Ravine South, May 17, 2012

Ten of us ventured out into the section of Whitemud Ravine to the south of Snow Valley ski hill this evening. Not a huge diversity of birds, but some good ones and good views.

The highlights were a pair of Western Tanagers, at least a dozen Tennessee Warblers, and about 40 Bank Swallows prospecting the burrows at their colony on the west side of the creek. We saw 20 species, which are listed below. Thanks to all for an enjoyable walk in the park!

Mallard	Tennessee Warbler
Great Blue Heron	Golden-crowned Kinglet
Franklin's Gull	Ruby-crowned Kinglet (heard)
Ring-billed Gull	Purple Finch
Raven	Pine Siskin
American Crow	Hermit Thrush (2 heard)
Black-capped Chickadee	American Robin
Bank Swallow	Western Tanager
Eastern Phoebe	White-throated Sparrow (heard)
Yellow Warbler	Dark-eyed Junco

**Martin Sharp**



*Forster's Tern*

DC

## Field Trip Reports

### ENC St. Albert Songbirds, May 13, 2012

Percy Zalasky led our group of 21 along the trails in St. Albert, starting at Lacombe Lake Park. A single Wilson's Warbler was particularly uncooperative and was glimpsed by only a few. Just as the group was leaving the parking area, a Forster's Tern was diving into the lake.

From there we headed to the spruce lot (Hogan Road) to observe a Great Horned Owl pair. We also enjoyed the antics of a Ruby-crowned Kinglet.

Thanks to the invitation of Pauline and Jack Dehaas, the group was able to hike the lovely nearby nature trail at Fairhaven before heading to Murray Marsh to complete the day with shorebirds and waterfowl. We saw 77 species listed below:

Eared Grebe	Blue-headed Vireo
Great Blue Heron	Warbling Vireo
Canada Goose	Red-eyed Vireo
Mallard	Blue Jay
Northern Pintail	Black-billed Magpie
Gadwall	American Crow
American Wigeon	Common Raven
Northern Shoveller	Tree Swallow
Blue-winged Teal	Barn Swallow
Lesser Scaup	Cliff Swallow
Ring-necked Duck	Black-capped Chickadee
Redhead	White-breasted Nuthatch
Common Goldeneye	Red-breasted Nuthatch
Bufflehead	House Wren
Ruddy Duck	Golden-crowned Kinglet
Ruffed Grouse	Ruby-crowned Kinglet
American Coot	American Robin
Killdeer	Swainson's Thrush
American Avocet	American Pipit
Greater Yellowlegs	European Starling
Lesser Yellowlegs	Orange-crowned Warbler
White-rumped Sandpiper	Yellow Warbler
Semipalmated Sandpiper	Wilson's Warbler
Least Sandpiper	Yellow-rumped [Myrtle] Warbler
Wilson's Snipe	Ovenbird
Wilson's Phalarope	Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Franklin's Gull	Chipping Sparrow
Ring-billed Gull	Clay-colored Sparrow
California Gull	Savannah Sparrow
Forster's Tern	Song Sparrow
Great Horned Owl	Dark-eyed [Slate-colored] Junco
Belted Kingfisher	White-crowned Sparrow
Downy Woodpecker	White-throated Sparrow
Pileated Woodpecker	Snow Bunting
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	Red-winged Blackbird
Eastern Phoebe	Yellow-headed Blackbird
	Brewer's Blackbird
	Brown-headed Cowbird
	House Finch
	Purple Finch
	House Sparrow

**Ann Carter and Brian Stephens**



*Belted Kingfisher*

*Photo by Gerald Romanchuk*

### ENC City Nature Walk, Sir Wilfred Laurier Park, May 8, 2012

Sixteen of us walked through Sir Wilfred Laurier Park on the ENC field trip. It was a beautiful evening with hardly a breeze. Everyone got a good look at the Belted Kingfishers that were seen on the far shore of the river. A Yellow-rumped Warbler was very accommodating. He sang from a nearby tree and posed nicely for photos. A White-breasted Nuthatch seemed to be investigating a woodpecker hole, perhaps for a nest. Spotted Sandpipers were seen flying just above the river to the shore. All in all, a lovely walk in the woods. We saw 18 species, which are listed below.

Canada Goose	Belted Kingfisher
Mallard	Black-billed Magpie
Bufflehead	American Crow
Common Goldeneye	Black-capped Chickadee
Common Merganser	White-breasted Nuthatch
Spotted Sandpiper	American Robin
Franklin's Gull	Orange-crowned Warbler
Ring-billed Gull	Yellow-rumped Warbler
Rock Dove	Dark-eyed Junco

**Dawne Colwell**

#### *Where's the bird?*



DC

## Field Trip Reports

### ENC Jackie Parker Park and Leduc Area, May 5, 2012

Our lucky group of thirteen started the day at Jackie Parker Park, where Gerry and James Fox located the Black-crowned Night Herons for us. The birds graciously provided clear views both in the treetop and in flight as the geese and ducks puddled. A walk along the pond edge produced close-ups of displaying Red-winged Blackbirds and Common Grackles. We paused to have a quick look at the invasive Sea Buckthorn, which is very prominent at the north end of the park. (Thanks to Dawne for the ID. I found it under several names; however, Buckthorn seems to be the accepted one in Alberta.)

Mill Creek Ravine yielded a small group of Swainson's and Hermit Thrushes and an eye-level flock of Yellow-rumped as well as Orange-crowned Warblers.

A drive south took us to Leduc, where we enjoyed an intimate setting with various common waterfowl in Fred Johns Park. After the photographers recorded the vivid spring plumages of the ducks, we strolled along the backyard feeders. We were rewarded by a series of duos: White-crowned and White-throated Sparrows, Purple and House Finches, Tree and Barn Swallows.

To avoid a mutiny there was a brief stop for coffee and snacks, which we consumed at Telford Lake while the Red-necked Grebes were displaying at the west-end viewing platform. We scoped the lake from the platforms along the south side, finding a Common Loon and a Pied-billed Grebe among the many common species. The Purple Martins were vocal and conspicuous, especially when a gull landed on their bird-box apartments.

We counted and eBirded 486 individual birds from the following 54 species:



**Common Grackle**

*Photo by Janice Hurlburt*

Common Loon	Northern Flicker
Pied-billed Grebe	Pileated Woodpecker
Horned Grebe	Blue Jay
Red-necked Grebe	Black-billed Magpie
Double-crested Cormorant	American Crow
Great Blue Heron	Purple Martin
Black-crowned Night-Heron	Tree Swallow
Canada Goose	Barn Swallow
American Wigeon	Black-capped Chickadee
Mallard	Red-breasted Nuthatch
Canvasback	White-breasted Nuthatch
Redhead	Swainson's Thrush
Lesser Scaup	Hermit Thrush
Bufflehead	American Robin
Common Goldeneye	European Starling
Red-breasted Merganser	Orange-crowned Warbler
Ruddy Duck	Yellow-rumped Warbler
Swainson's Hawk	Savannah Sparrow
American Kestrel	Song Sparrow
Merlin	White-throated Sparrow
Sora	White-crowned Sparrow
American Coot	Red-winged Blackbird
Spotted Sandpiper	Common Grackle
Franklin's Gull	Brown-headed Cowbird
Ring-billed Gull	Purple Finch
California Gull	House Finch
Downy Woodpecker	House Sparrow

### Ann Carter



**Red-necked Grebe**

*Photo by Ann Carter*

## Field Trip Reports

### ENC City Nature Walk, Whitemud Ravine, April 29, 2012

Nine participants spent 4 hours walking 6 km on the trail this lovely spring morning, finishing just as the rain showers began. We chatted and counted birds for our new eBird endeavour.

Fun stuff included a handful of ducks that repeatedly flew past over the creek (we didn't want to count the same birds multiple times!). A single Common Merganser was sunning on a log, and an abundance of Ruby-crowned Kinglets with a small number of Golden-crowned Kinglets moved in the treetops. We kept hearing warblers, but it took a long time to finally see a pair of Yellow-rumped. We had a possible Warbling Vireo who answered our imitations, but we never got a visual on that one. The highlight was an owl-versus-raven drama. Parent Great Horned Owls were actively protecting their single owlet against the repeated passes of a hunting Raven. The owlet is almost at the "brancher" stage – we saw it standing right on the edge of the nest.

And yes, there were mosquitoes. We saw 173 individual birds and 37 species.

- |                                    |                                     |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Canada Goose, 4                    | Blue Jay, 1                         |
| Mallard, 5                         | Black-billed Magpie, 1              |
| Common Goldeneye, 4                | Northern Flicker, 1                 |
| Common Merganser, 1                | Black-capped Chickadee, 14          |
| Northern Goshawk, 1                | Boreal Chickadee, 2                 |
| Red-tailed Hawk, 1                 | Red-breasted Nuthatch, 3            |
| American Coot, 1                   | White-breasted Nuthatch, 4          |
| Franklin's Gull, 6                 | Golden-crowned Kinglet, 3           |
| Ring-billed Gull, 10               | Ruby-crowned Kinglet, 20            |
| Rock Dove, 2                       | American Robin, 3                   |
| Great Horned Owl, 2 adult, 1 owlet | European Starling, 4 in parking lot |
| Belted Kingfisher, 1               | Bohemian Waxwing, 11                |
| Downy Woodpecker, 3                | Yellow-rumped Warbler, 2            |
| American Crow, 5                   | American Tree Sparrow, 1            |
| Common Raven, 7                    | Song Sparrow, 1                     |
| Northern Flicker, 1                | Dark-eyed Junco, 4                  |
| Pileated Woodpecker, 1             | House Finch, 1                      |
| Eastern Phoebe, 1 in parking lot   | Pine Siskin, 35                     |
| Warbling Vireo, (possible)         | House Sparrow, 5 in parking lot     |

**Ann Carter**

### ENC Dry Island Buffalo Jump April 14, 2012

Ten of us set out in the snow this morning for Dry Island Buffalo Jump. We started off working the east side of Bittern Lake, then high-tailed it for Dry Island, where the snow stopped and the skies cleared a bit and we had a good hike. Five of us then continued west towards Innisfail and eventually returned to Edmonton by Highway 2. We saw 47 species:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| Double-crested Cormorant, 4                 | Unidentified large falcon                                     |
| Tundra Swan, over 400 on Hwy 587 west of 21 | American Coot   |
| Greater White-fronted Goose                 | Killdeer  |
| Canada Goose                                | Franklin's Gull   |
| Cackling Goose                              | Ring-billed Gull  |
| Mallard                                     | Rock Pigeon   |
| Northern Pintail                            | Mourning Dove, 1  |
| Gadwall                                     | Snowy Owl, 6  |
| American Wigeon                             | Northern Flicker, 3   |
| Northern Shoveler                           | Black-billed Magpie   |
| Green-winged Teal                           | American Crow   |
| Lesser Scaup                                | Common Raven  |
| Greater Scaup                               | Horned Lark   |
| Ring-necked Duck                            | Black-capped Chickadee  |
| Canvasback                                  | American Robin  |
| Redhead                                     | European Starling   |
| Common Goldeneye                            | American Tree Sparrow   |
| Bufflehead                                  | Lapland Longspur (several large flocks)                       |
| Northern Harrier                            | Snow Bunting (many thousands)                                 |
| Sharp-shinned Hawk                          | Western Meadowlark (2, the second being devoured by a Merlin) |
| Red-tailed Hawk                             | Red-winged Blackbird  |
| Rough-legged Hawk, 3                        | Yellow-headed Blackbird                                       |
| American Kestrel                            | Brewer's Blackbird  |
| Merlin                                      |   |

**Martin Sharp**



*Dry Island Buffalo Jump Field Trip (right)  
Photo by Gerald Romanchuk*

## Field Trip Reports

### ENC Wainwright Geese and Grouse Trip, April 21–22, 2012

Fifteen of us set off Saturday morning to Wainwright to join Laurence Hoover from the Wainwright Wildlife Society at a Sharp-tailed Grouse Lek on CFB Wainwright. On Sunday we met Laurence at 4:30 a.m. After orientation from the base staff, we reached the lek site and were in the blinds by 5:45. The birds had already begun and flushed away from the lek, but were back within 15 minutes. Six males squared off and began “dancing” in the dawn light. Twice they were flushed by passing raptors, one of which came in quite low. By just after 7:00 a.m. it was clear that they had flown quite a distance away and were not likely to return. We think a total of 9 birds were around the lek. Laurence said that this is a low number after 2 difficult years for the birds.

The set-up at the lek provides exceptional viewing. Special thanks to Laurence, the Wainwright Wildlife Society, and CFB Wainwright for making access possible.

Otherwise, we birded at Cooking Lake, Hastings Lake, the Amisk area, Viking area (Thomas Lake), and several areas around Wainwright. Between Viking and Wainwright, we found a Snowy Owl perched on a fence post in the dry grassland areas. On Saturday, after we had checked in to the hotel, we delayed supper and headed east and north. We followed Snow Geese until we hit a range road between two feeding areas with one of the largest groups of geese I have ever seen – I think we all had different ideas of the total (50,000 to 100,000), but numbers aside, the lighting was ideal and we had over an hour of low fly-overs as birds moved from one area to another.

On Sunday after our second breakfast, we worked our way east and south of CFB Wainwright, stopping at some lakes and generally birding along the road. We took an adventure road toward Wainwright Dunes Natural Area. We arrived eventually at a surprising RR 51 / TWP sign (not expecting the track we were on to rate an official designation) near a cluster of trees. We had lunch there, which resulted in finding quite a few species – Mountain Bluebird, Flicker, Tree Swallow, Lapland Longspur, American Pipit, Sandhill Cranes, and Vesper Sparrow.

By mid afternoon we headed back to Edmonton along Highway 13 to Camrose.

We saw 81 species, which are listed to the right.

**Brian Stephens**

*(see cover photo and another photo on page 26)*

Common Loon	Sharp-tailed Grouse
Red-necked Grebe	American Coot
American White Pelican	Sandhill Crane
Double-crested Cormorant	Killdeer
Great Blue Heron	American Avocet
Turkey Vulture	Greater Yellowlegs
Greater White-fronted Goose	Lesser Yellowlegs
Snow Goose	Wilson's Snipe
Ross's Goose	Franklin's Gull
Canada Goose	Ring-billed Gull
Cackling Goose	California Gull
Trumpeter Swan	Rock Dove
Tundra Swan	Mourning Dove
Gadwall	Great Horned Owl
Eurasian Wigeon	Snowy Owl
American Wigeon	Downy Woodpecker
Mallard	Northern Flicker
Blue-winged Teal	Eastern Phoebe
Northern Shoveler	Shrike (sp)
Northern Pintail	Black-billed Magpie
Green-winged Teal	Crow
Canvasback	Common Raven
Redhead	Horned Lark
Ring-necked Duck	Tree Swallow
Greater Scaup	Black-capped Chickadee
Lesser Scaup	Mountain Bluebird
Bufflehead	American Robin
Common Goldeneye	European Starling
Ruddy Duck	American Pipit
Bald Eagle	Common Yellowthroat
Northern Harrier	American Tree Sparrow
Sharp-shinned Hawk	Vesper Sparrow
Northern Goshawk	Song Sparrow
Red-tailed Hawk	Dark-eyed Junco
Rough-legged Hawk	Lapland Longspur
American Kestrel	Red-winged Blackbird
Merlin	Yellow-headed Blackbird
Peregrine Falcon	Western Meadowlark
Gray Partridge	Brewer's Blackbird
	Common Grackle
	House Sparrow
	House Finch



DC

## Field Trip Reports

### ENC Elk Island and Owls, March 31, 2012

On a Saturday afternoon over 20 of us met at Elk Island for some general birding. We decided things would be more productive out to the east rather than the planned birding in the park.

We drove out to RR 195 and went north until we saw a large flock of waterfowl in a meltwater pond. Lots of Canada Geese with a few White-fronts mixed in. After quite a bit of back and forth discussion, we decided we had a few good candidates for Cackling Goose, as well as a bunch of Pintails and a few Mallards.

We continued east for several bird-less miles until we got to the east side of Beaverhill Lake. Steve Knight will be happy to know that this time the lead vehicle didn't miss the first owl of the day! No layers of excuses were needed. We saw a Snowy Owl out in the field, roosting on the last remaining patch of snow.

At Mundare Beach, we walked out into the grass. Kurt Brauner spotted 2 more Snowies perched on rocks in the distance, with not much more than their heads showing above the grass. There were 5 or 6 Short-eared Owls cruising around. One of them took a few passes at the Snowies.

We saw several Red-tails on the roads, a few Harriers, and flocks of Snow Buntings and Lapland Longspurs flying over. Back at Elk Island we had seen and heard Tree Sparrows, Juncos, and Redpolls at the Visitor Centre.

We met Ray Cromie for dinner at Ardrossan. He led us on an owling expedition as evening set in. The first few stops were quiet, but on the north end of Elk Island, we heard a distant Great Horned Owl. Then at the same stop a Saw-whet started tooting. It came in close to the road, and everyone in the group, which had grown to 28, got a great look. It was a lifer for several people and was definitely a big hit!

Big thanks to Ray for a fantastic evening!!!

**Gerald Romanchuk**

### ENC City Nature Walk, Whitemud Ravine, March 17, 2012

Thirty ENC members ventured onto the icy trails of Whitemud Ravine from the river to Snow Valley. Some early arrivals saw a Common Merganser flying upstream. The creek has water running over the winter ice from early runoff and some open areas. We spent 3 hours along the trail, with a highlight being a Northern Goshawk (juvenile) that put on quite a show, flying back and forth and calling.

We saw 24 species, which are listed below.

Canada Goose	Black-capped Chickadee
Mallard	Boreal Chickadee
Common Merganser	Red-breasted Nuthatch
Northern Goshawk	White-breasted Nuthatch
Merlin	Brown Creeper
Rock Dove	Bohemian Waxwing
Great Horned Owl	Dark-eyed Junco
Downy Woodpecker	Pine Grosbeak
Hairy Woodpecker	Common Redpoll
Blue Jay	Pine Siskin
Black-billed Magpie	House Sparrow
Common Raven	House Finch

**Brian Stephens**

#### *Saw-whet Owl*



*Photo by Ann Carter*

## Edmonton Nature Club Indoor Meetings, 2011/2012

Ron Ramsey, ENC President, organized a varied, interesting, and entertaining slate of speakers for the indoor club meetings. There truly was “something for everybody,” and often the talks I knew least about were the most informative.

Following the annual general meeting and club members’ slide show on September 16, 2011, at the Percy Page Centre, ENC members met at The King’s University College for the first indoor meeting on October 21. There was some trepidation on the part of the executive over this move from the Provincial Museum. However, in recent years, the rental of the Museum Auditorium had become increasingly expensive. The King’s University College offered affordable space for an audience of fifty to a hundred people, typical of our indoor meeting attendance. The college was also able to provide suitable audiovisual equipment and a technician and guarantee the availability of a room for the dates we required.

### *Joyce Gould*

The first talk was given by Joyce Gould, a botanist and conservation specialist with the provincial department of Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation. The topic of her talk was the whitebark and limber pine, which are characteristic trees of higher elevations and the grassland foothills. Both species are being affected by the white pine blister rust and the mountain pine beetle. She spoke of the importance of their seeds for food, notably for Clark’s Nutcrackers, but also for squirrels and both Black and Grizzly Bears. Like several speakers to follow, she cautioned of changes occurring in the landscape for reasons not completely understood, with loss of flora and fauna. (An article on this talk appeared in the last *Parkland Naturalist*.)

### *Dr. Erin Bayne*

Dr. Erin Bayne is an Associate Professor in the Department of Biological Sciences at the University of Alberta who has researched the effects of landscape alteration on boreal birds and their behaviour. In his November 18 presentation he asked the question, “How are the birds doing?” and answered by saying, “Just fine, but not in all cases.” The premise of his talk was that everything we do has an effect that might be beneficial for some bird species but detrimental to others. He characterized the boreal ecosystem, which is the largest in the world, as having a paucity of tree species and a harsh climate, making it subject to dramatic local changes through fire or insect infestation. These conditions create diversity, which makes for varied bird habitats that support 60 to 70 breeding species, the highest in the continent.

Prior to 1980, there had been little large-scale human activity in the boreal forest, but that was to change, due first to agriculture and then to forestry. Loss of boreal forest in Saskatchewan due to clearing for agricultural land is approaching 20%. This might be beneficial for a bird species such as the Clay-colored Sparrow, but detrimental for a species such as the Black-throated Green Warbler. Forestry changes the composition of the habitat by introducing trees of the same age through replanting, whereas ideally, there should be a range from new growth to old growth. Species such as the White-throated Sparrow are

abundant in recent re-growth areas, while certain warblers require mature trees that might be 50 to 150 years old. Since 2005, the oil and gas industry has had a major impact, not just in total area disturbed, but also in the number of seismic cut-lines and pipeline rights-of-way. In an interesting study, Dr. Bayne showed how the distribution of Ovenbirds is affected by the presence of cut-lines, which they treat as boundaries to their territories, though this can be changed by having narrower, more closely spaced cut-lines. These linear features facilitate predator movement, and he showed a video of predators of songbird nests, including squirrels, deer, and bears.

### *Lisa Takats and Chris Priestley*

The Birds of Christmas presentation held on December 16 in the larger Atrium Lecture Theatre was a tag-team presentation by Lisa Takats Priestley and Chuck Priestley. Their topic was Northern Saw-whet Owl monitoring at Beaverhill Lake. Lisa noted that in the late 1980s Jim and Barb Beck started using call responses overnight to attract and record numbers of saw-whets on the Edmonton Christmas Bird Count. Long-time Edmonton area Christmas bird-counters were surprised that so many saw-whets were present throughout the winter.

Starting in 2002, banders at the Beaverhill Lake Bird Observatory used mist nets and an audiolure to attract and capture saw-whets. Captured owls were banded, weighed, and sexed before release. Again, observers were surprised by the numbers: in the first year 143 were captured, and that increased to 272 in 2004, although the fall numbers averaged about 150 between 2002 and 2007. The program of fall banding was extended to other banding stations across Alberta and Saskatchewan, and over 4,000 saw-whets were banded, of which approximately 60 were recovered. Almost half of the recoveries were east or southeast of where the saw-whet had been banded. Distances travelled exceeded 2,000 km in one case, although they averaged about 500 km. The speed of travel was also surprising, with some saw-whets averaging 40 to 100 km per night. As a result of coordinating these studies, a picture has emerged of saw-whets as variable partial migrants, nomads if you like, with annual movements in the fall mostly to the southeast, possibly influenced by the distribution of suitable forested habitat. The presentation ended with a musical slideshow depicting all aspects of the saw-whet banding that has become a family event, complete with barbecue, in recent years at the Beaverhill Bird Observatory (check the Beaverhill Bird Observatory website, [beaverhillbirds.com](http://beaverhillbirds.com), for details).

### *Shawna Pelech*

Shawna Pelech, an Instructor at Grant MacEwan University and a PhD candidate at the University of Alberta, was our first speaker of the New Year on January 20. Her research topic focuses on forest plant and animal communities and how these might be altered under future climates. She developed a theme already presented by our first two speakers, that natural systems are changing all the time. Forests are subject to natural and man-made disturbances, whether by fire, insect pests, windblown trees, or avalanches. Fire alone can burn up to 8 million hec-

tares of forest annually in Canada, although the majority of fires are small, less than 200 hectares. Trees are adapted to respond to fires, whether the adaptation is the Douglas Fir's thick protective bark; the Jack Pine's resin-sealed cones, which need fire to open; or; the poplar and other species' ability to spread by suckering new shoots. Certain plants, notably fireweed, but also various shrubs (e.g., willow) and bushes (e.g., raspberry and rose) respond quickly; within five to ten years, considerable regrowth occurs. This creates good feeding conditions for small mammals such as Deer Mice and Meadow and Red-backed Voles, which, in turn, provide food for a variety of predators.

As is well known to birders, burnt-over areas provide good habitat for the two boreal woodpeckers: the Three-toed and the Black-backed. Shawna found that Black-backed Woodpeckers were not at the high density that might have been anticipated and were avoiding severely burned areas, as if trees "that had burned to a crisp" had no beetles. Apparently, the severity of the fire, as well as the patchiness of distribution, may be important in determining the suitability of these areas for woodpeckers. She speculated that, as a result of climate change, forest fires would become more severe and larger areas would be burned.

### ***Dr. Dick Dekker***

On February 7, Dr. Dick Dekker gave a PowerPoint slide presentation to the Bird Study Group at the Percy Page Centre of two talks he had presented at the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Conference at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver in August 2011. Dick is a long-standing member of the Edmonton Nature Club and one of its predecessors, the Edmonton Bird Club. For over 45 years, he has observed the natural world and the relationship between predators and their prey. He has meticulously recorded his sightings, which have been published in dozens of papers, both popular and scientific. His first presentation concerned Beaverhill Lake, a shallow wetland located southeast of Edmonton. The lake covered roughly 180 square kilometres during the 1970s and 1980s but subsequently shrank in size until it completely dried up in 2006. Dick explained that a major cause was a ten-year cycle of drought beginning in 1995, with a succession of years when annual precipitation was below average and, in some years, well below average. Superimposed on the drought, work by Ducks Unlimited (DU) to restore or create breeding habitat for waterfowl by damming and diverting water from inflowing creeks has further depleted the supply of water to the lake. Dick's data showed that DU had licences to divert 1.5 million cubic metres of water per annum. The effect of this diversion was exacerbated because, as the lake area dwindled and levels became shallower, the relative losses by evaporation increased. Collectively the effect had been to render Beaverhill Lake dry; a great loss to shorebirds and naturalists, as the lake had previously attracted up to a quarter million shorebirds, for which it had received international recognition.

In the second part of his presentation, Dr. Dekker took us to Boundary Bay on the coast of British Columbia, where he has studied Peregrine Falcons in recent winters. Peregrines (formerly known as duck hawks) are well adapted to prey on ducks. However, his research showed that Peregrines, under

pressure from the numbers of Bald Eagles, which increase during the winter, had begun hunting shorebirds. Early in the winter Peregrines hunt mainly ducks but, as the winter progresses, the numbers of Bald Eagles increase once the easy pickings of the salmon run are over. The eagles obtain their prey by robbing both Peregrines and Gyrfalcons of their waterfowl. To counteract this kleptoparasitism (stealing of prey), Peregrines have switched from preying on waterfowl to preying on Dunlins. They are more able to evade the eagles with this prey, which they cannot do carrying the heavier waterfowl. This has consequences for the wintering Dunlin population, which Dick estimated as 40,000 birds, as the falcons are taking more Dunlins to account for prey lost to the marauding eagles. Dr. Dekker estimated 40 Dunlins per day are preyed upon so that, over the winter months, the combined take by predators amounted to 14% of the total Dunlin population. As another example of changes having consequences, Dr. Dekker described how Dunlin no longer roost at high tide, making them susceptible to predation, but now fly around in a large flock over water, making them more difficult targets for the Peregrines. Changes have been imposed upon both the falcons and the shorebirds due to the increased numbers of Bald Eagles.



***Juvenile Bald Eagle***  
***Photo by Don Delaney***

### ***Greg Pohl***

On February 17, Greg Pohl, a biologist with Natural Resources Canada (NRC) gave a talk titled "All a Flutter," a fascinating presentation on moths. As part of a biodiversity group within NRC, Greg has travelled throughout Alberta and Canada studying and collecting insects and recently helped publish a checklist of over 2,300 species of moths and butterflies of Alberta. Following some introductory remarks on the characteristics of insects and moths, in particular, he showed photos of each of the moth families present in Alberta, together with interesting anecdotal information. We learned, for example, that Stan Gorsche, in photographing an iridescent blue moth near Lac La Biche, had added a new species of leafcutter moth to the Alberta list; and that Greg's son, at an early age, had similar good fortune once his dad had identified the species. The meeting was also enlivened by the presence of a number of lepidopterists who were every bit as enthusiastic about their subject as Greg. There is no shortage of opportunities for them to make important contributions to our knowledge of moths in Alberta.

### **Dr. Colleen Cassady St. Clair**

It was standing room only on March 16 when Dr. Colleen Cassady St. Clair gave a presentation on the Edmonton Urban Coyote Project. Unfortunately, the advertised presenter and researcher, Maureen Murray, was unable to attend, as she was recovering from painful dental work, but her supervisor more than did justice to the quality of the research being undertaken at the University of Alberta's Department of Biological Sciences. It was a story of human and wildlife conflict and issues of safety and property at risk, of how the coyotes had gone from tolerance of humans, to habituation, to food conditioning (scavenging), to reliance and conflict within the urban setting. Coyotes are naturally a mid-west species, but in recent decades they have spread across the continent with the extermination of their larger predators (such as bears and wolves) and have started exploiting city habitats from San Diego to New York. They bring a number of benefits: they control pests and rodents and are useful scavengers of dead animals, as well as giving people the aesthetic enjoyment of seeing wildlife in an urban setting. However, they can create a reduced sense of security, particularly among owners of small pets, and can be vectors of disease. In the larger scheme of things, sightings and predation of pets are common; threatening behaviours, which might include stalking people or biting children, are occasional; and attacks are very rare. However, the cities of both Edmonton and Calgary get multiple calls every week from residents concerned about coyote sightings, leading to the initiation of the Urban Coyote Project to research and provide information on their numbers, distribution, habitat, diet, and movements. This information gathering is necessary to mount an outreach program by city administrations to respond to public concerns.

In Edmonton, coyotes have been captured and fitted with GPS collars, which record their location every three hours in a study area principally south and west of the University of Alberta, including both natural and residential areas. To date, 24 coyotes have been tracked, and Colleen shared some of the information and preliminary findings from this study. The health of captured coyotes is assessed before they are released. It is evident that healthy coyotes have smaller ranges and occupy more natural areas, whereas many coyotes range over larger areas and are using habitat with a higher proportion of industrial and commercial land-use. Stable isotopes used to compare the diets of coyotes determined that many animals were more likely to be eating garbage, as opposed to capturing prey. From the tracking data, a number of habitat characteristics of these urban coyotes

have been identified, but more information is needed. As noted earlier, the project has an important outreach component. To respond to survey requests and provide details of sightings, visit [www.edmontonurbancoyotes.ca](http://www.edmontonurbancoyotes.ca).

### **Glen Hvenegaard**

The last meeting of the indoor season was held on April 20 and delivered by Glen Hvenegaard, a Professor of Geography and Environmental Studies at the Augustana Campus of the University of Alberta in Camrose. His topic was "Connecting Kids with Nature." Referencing the book *Last Child in the Woods*, by Richard Louv, he referred to a condition termed "nature deficit disorder" and told us why this has come about and how, as naturalists, we could help reverse this trend. It is common knowledge that children today spend little time outdoors (perhaps 30 minutes each week) compared to ten hours each day, on average, in front of the computer screen. They are adept at identifying the trappings of popular culture but know little about the natural world that surrounds them. Much of this natu-

ral habitat is disappearing in urban settings, and too often "outside" is seen as a dangerous environment for a child. Glen reminded us of the numerous benefits that time outside bestows: physical health, stress reduction, education, and more motivated and enthusiastic individuals.

Glen asked us to think back to the development of our own interest in nature. Time and opportunity were important factors, and adult mentors and community support, often as part of a social activity, encouraged participation and enjoyment. It's impor-

tant that children learn at their own pace, that they have the opportunity to "touch and feel," that they learn through play that nature is cool. Glen cautioned that issues of ecology should not be introduced at too early an age: "You need to learn to love it, before you're asked to save it."

Admittedly, Glen was speaking to the converted, as the audience was well aware of the benefits nature brings for our health and well-being, but it was good to reflect on this in the last meeting of the indoor season. The first meeting of the 2012/2013 indoor season will be held on the third Friday in October 2012.

### **Alan Hingston**

*An article on the presentations given by Dr. Bridget Stutchbury at the University of Alberta and the ENC Banquet held on April 24, together with a review of her book, Silence of the Songbirds, will appear in the next PN.*

### **Coyote**



**Photo by Gerald Romanchuk**

# Wildbird General Store Bird Sightings Report

January 1, 2012 to June 30, 2012



## Raptors

**Gyrfalcon:** imm. seen Feb. 2, adult Feb. 20, at Gov't Terminal; adult seen at Hwy 28A and Manning Fwy Feb. 20; adult seen at Hawrelak Park Feb. 20 by Gerald Romanchuk. Adult sighted near Legend Golf Course Mar. 25 by Gerald Romanchuk.  
**Prairie Falcon:** seen at Gov't Terminal, ENC Field Trip Jan. 14; 2 seen at Gov't Terminal Feb. 2 by Gerald Romanchuk.

**Prairie Falcon:** sighted at Elk Island Park April 29 by John Warden.  
**Peregrine Falcon:** first reported from Inland Cement Mar. 25 by Fred Whiley; pair seen at the Legislative Grounds on Mar. 27 by Andrew Forest; single bird observed at the University of Alberta on April 2 by Del Huget. Later, several Peregrines were observed at Cooking L. and around Beaverhill L. Eric Wallace saw 2 Peregrines at Beaverhill L. on April 20. **Bald Eagles:** pair of adults overwintering at Misty Ridge seen Feb. 1 by Jim Lange and Linda Jarmolicz. Jim Lange observed then at the nest site on the Athabasca R. near Misty Ridge on Mar. 10. After that reports were widespread, as the eagles were migrating throughout the province. **Golden Eagle:** photographed flying over Lu Carbyn's property near Cross L. on Mar. 11 by Gerald Romanchuk, with a second sighting by Gerald near Legends Golf Course Mar. 25. **Northern Harrier:** first reported at Kallal Meadows Mar. 16 by Gerry Fox. Another seen near Goodridge L. along Range Rd 21 north of Sec. 661. **American Kestrel:** first observed near Joseph L. April 3 by James Fox; Fred Whiley and Jim Lange observed 1 at the Pembina R. bridge west of Fawcett on April 9. **Sharp-shinned Hawk:** 4 observed migrating at Misty Ridge April 10 by Jim Lange. **Red-tailed Hawk:** first reported Mar. 25 by various birders in the Elk Island-Beaverhill L. area. Fred Whiley and I observed a very pale individual sitting on a pole along Sec. 769 north of Barrhead on April 10. Based on the markings, it seemed to be Krider's race, though that would be out of the normal range for them. We did not have the opportunity for more viewing due to traffic and lack of access close to the bird. **Turkey Vultures:** reported from Tawatinaw April 25 by Trevor Roper; another observed north of Ryley April 29 by Curtis Manley and Bob Parsons; 2 seen near Devon on May 16 by Loreley Will; and 2 observed May 26 during the May Species Count on the east side of Wakomao L. by Jim Lange, Vince Cottrell, and Fred Whiley. Another 2 sighted last week in the Vilna area. The Vilna-Smokey L. and Victoria Settlement areas are normal range for this species, as is Cold Lake Prov. Park.

## Owls

**Snowy Owls:** 11 seen in Beaverhill L. area Jan. 15 by Gerald Romanchuk; adult male seen on Hwy 2 near Vimy Mar. 31 by Jim Lange. Snowy Owls were seen in the Beaverhill area in low numbers this winter and the same for the area NW of St. Albert. A late sighting was a male approx. 80 km north of Brooks on May 18 seen by Ray and Shirley Cromie and Trevor Roper. **Short-eared Owls:** very abundant on the east side of Beaverhill L., with 25-30 observed at Mundare Beach Mar. 9 by Gerald Romanchuk. **Hawk Owl:** 1 spent the winter in the vicinity of the Cooking Lake Airport; 1 seen at the junction of Sec. 801 and 663 on Feb. 1 by Linda Jarmolicz and me; 5 seen between Cross L. and Flatbush on Mar. 3 by Steve Knight and Gerald Romanchuk. The ENC Field Trip to Cross L. on Mar. 10 located 1 along Sec. 801 north of Long Island L. and another west of Cross L. near French Creek Community Hall. **Great Gray Owl:** the only sighting this winter was along Sec. 801 south of Sec. 663 on Mar. 11, by Gerald Romanchuk.

## Waterfowl

**Canada Geese:** arrived in the Edmonton area in the 2<sup>nd</sup> week of March; a group of 12 and another group of 4 were observed flying over north Edmonton on Mar. 11 by Jim Lange. **Snow Geese:** were first reported on Mar. 27 at Amisk Creek by Brian Stephens. Due to drought conditions in the Beaverhill L. area, the Snow Goose Chase buses were traveling to the Holden area. It was a real chase trying to catch up with the elusive birds despite many birders scouting and posting the latest info on the location of large flocks. They were there 1 hour and gone the next! **Trumpeter Swans:** 4 sighted south of Hwy 21 and Sec. 833 on April 3 by James Fox. **Tundra Swans:** 10 were observed on April 3 on Rge Rd. 243 and Twp Rd 502. On April 22 Janet Watkinson and I located a flock of approx. 250 in a field next to Misty Ridge Ski Hill. **Mallards, Pintails, and White-fronted Geese:** first observed near Bittern Lake on Mar. 28 by Brian Stephens. Fred Whiley and I located a flock of Pintails at the Pembina R. crossing SW of Fawcett on April 10. **Greater Scaup:** flock located on Looking Back Lake near New Sarepta on April 3 by Gerald Romanchuk. **Red-heads:** 4 located on Rge Rd 243 and Twp Rd 502 on April 3 by James Fox. **Lesser Scaup:** 12 located on Rge Rd 243 and Twp Rd 502 on April 3 by James Fox. **Eared Grebes:** 2 located on Lyseng Reservoir north of Camrose on April 19 by Fred Whiley. **Hooded Mergansers:** 2 seen at Amisk Creek bridge on April 19 by Fred Whiley. **Yellow-billed Loon:** sighted on Cold Lake at Kinasoo Beach on May 24 by Ted Hindmarch. **Franklin Gull:** sighted at Wakomao L. on Mar. 31 by Nerida. **Caspian Terns:** located on Cold Lake during the ENC Field Trip on June 2-3. **Common and Forster's Terns:** sighted in Elk Island Park on May 13 by Gerald Romanchuk.

*Note:* Due to a warm winter, Cold Lake stayed open well into the New Year, which resulted in some interesting sightings of birds that should have migrated much earlier in the fall. On Jan. 11, Richard Klauke reported 250+ **Common Mergansers**, 2 **Double-crested Cormorants**, 1 **Herring Gull**, 1 **Common Loon**, 1 **Redhead**, 6-10 **Glaucous Gulls**, and 1 **Greater Black-backed Gull**. What became of these birds once the lake finally froze?

## Shorebirds

Shorebirds continue to be difficult to locate due to the low water levels in the Beaverhill L. area. **Wilson's Snipe:** reported by Simone Marler in the Fort McMurray area on April 8. **Semipalmated Plover; Semipalmated, Least, and Pectoral Sandpipers; Long-billed Dowitchers; Marbled and Hudsonian Godwit:** reported in the Ryley -Holden area on April 29 by Bob Parsons. **Whimbrel:** flock of 7 sighted in east of La Corey on Hwy 55 May 13.

## Others

**Great Blue Herons:** three pair back at the nest sites along Hwy 18 at Wakomao L. on Mar. 31, reported by Nerida. **Meadowlarks:** 3 seen south of the Amisk Creek bridge on Rge Rd 183 on April 3 by James Fox. **Brewer's Blackbird:** overwintered in southwest Edmonton (based on photos submitted to Wildbird General Store), reported by Avery Tymofichuk on Jan. 20. **Varied Thrush:** seen by Elaine Jenkins in her yard in Sherwood Park on Jan. 16 and 17; seen throughout the winter in north Riverbend by Judy Johnson, began calling in late March, and left in early April. **Robins:** overwintering flock of 25+ seen in St. Albert on Jan. 18 by Sheila Hay. **Snow Buntings:** thousands seen east of Beaverhill L. at Mundare Beach on Jan. 15 by Gerald Romanchuk; estimated 20,000 observed in a cultivated field along Rge Rd 21 near Goodridge Lake on Mar. 31 by Jim Lange. **Mountain Bluebirds:** 1 male and 2 females first reported at Wakomao L. on Mar. 31 by Nerida. **Dark-eyed Juncos:** observed in large groups all along the county roads this spring in early April; flock of 35-40 observed near Hastings L. on April 1 by Leni and John Honsaker. **Red-winged**

**Blackbirds:** 15 seen at Bittern L. on Mar. 31 by Fred Whiley; another was reported in Fort McMurray on Mar. 17 by Simone Marler. This bird may have possibly been overwintering in the area; however, could also be a very early migrant. **Northern Cardinal:** a male spent the winter in the Gold Bar neighbourhood near 106A Ave. A photo of the bird even made the Global TV news! This is a separate sighting from the resident pair in Sh. Park. **Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches:** 2 sighted north of LaCorey in the Cold Lake Air Weapons Range on Feb. 29 by Curtis Manley; another sighted in Fort McMurray on Feb. 10 by Simone Marler; and Fred Whiley had 1 stay at his feeder in north Edmonton most of the winter. **White-winged Crossbills:** small flock seen in Wembley on Mar. 10. **Red Crossbills:** numerous reports this winter, including Steve Knight in St. Albert and Judy Johnson in the Riverbend area. **Black-backed Woodpecker:** only 2 reports this winter, 1 seen in the Slave L. area on Feb. 4 by Curtis Manley, and 1 seen in the Cross L. area on Feb. 29 by Gerald Romanchuk. **Mourning Dove:** seen in the Holden area on April 29 by Curtis and Michelle Manley; reported at the Sh. Park Fish and Game property near Gambling L. on May 31 by Jim Lange. **Say's Phoebe:** 1 seen from Amisk Cr. bridge by passengers on the April 29 Snow Goose Chase bus; 1 seen on the east side of Beaverhill on May 13 by Gerald Romanchuk. **Purple Martins:** returned to the region by the end of April; 3 observed at To-field Golf Course on April 28–29 (Snow Goose Chase). **Western Tanager:** seen in Whitemud Ravine on May 10 by Del Huget. **Winter Wrens:** 2 seen on May 11 by Lu Carbyn on his property near Cross L. They were not heard on the site last spring; however, they are now in Cross L. and ForFar Park campgrounds in very low numbers. **Rufous Hummingbird:** likely seen by Ron Jones at Lily Lake Estates. **Ruby-throated Hummingbird:** seen in Redwater on May 15 by Michelle. Janet Watkinson in St. Albert had a hummingbird in her yard briefly on May 16, but did not see it in time for ID. **Harris's Sparrow:** located in S. Edmonton on May 17 by Del Huget. **Lazuli Buntings:** several reported well outside their normal range, 1 seen in Fort McMurray on May 16 by Bruce and Joan Crawford, and the other seen near the Derrick Golf and Country Club in south Edmonton on May 26. **Common Grackle:** early migrant seen at Beaumaris L. on April 2 by Doug Faulder. **Bobolinks:** 2 or 3 seen near the Amisk Cr. Bridge on May 26 by Gerald Romanchuk. **Great Crested Flycatcher:** 2 reported at Elk Island on May 28 by Marcel Gehbaur. **Red-headed Woodpecker:** another bird well outside its range, observed by Charlotte Wasylik in Vermilion on June 1.

### Compiled by Jim Lange

Jim Lange maintains the Northern Alberta Bird Hotline (780-433-2473) which is sponsored by the Wildbird General Store and the Edmonton Nature Club.

#### Great Crested Flycatcher



Photo by Gerald Romanchuk



Mourning Dove

DC

#### Red Crossbill



Photo by Steve Knight

## Editorial Message

A big thank you to all the contributors of articles and photos for this issue of *The Parkland Naturalist*.

This issue is introducing four new columns that will appear on a regular basis.

**Chasing Birds** by Gerald Romanchuk  
**Parkland Plant Notes** by Patsy Cotterill  
**Bugs and Spiders** by Shelley Ryan-Hovind  
**ENC Indoor Meetings** by Alan Hingston

There will be four issues of the *PN* this year. July–September and October–December, 2012 are the two issues remaining. Next year there will be three issues; one every four months.

Do you have a story or photos to share with the ENC members? Send me an email.

**Judy Johnson** is the copy editor for the *PN*. I rely on her expertise and am very grateful for her help.

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

## The 2012 Snow Goose Chase: Charlotte's Blog

The other week I joined the AlbertaBird listserv to find out about bird sightings through the province and also connect with other Alberta birders.

After joining I got an email from one member, Bob Parsons, who is the special events coordinator for the Edmonton Nature Club, inviting my family and me to the annual Snow Goose Chase on April 28 in Tofield. Luckily, that day was free (the only free April Saturday on our calendar, in fact) so I was able to say "Yes"!

We did our morning chores as quickly as possible despite a heavy spring snowstorm all day Friday and early Saturday, and left at 8 a.m. to be at Tofield by 10. On our drive I saw about 50,000 Snow, Canada, and Greater White-fronted Geese, 11 American Kestrels, 16 Red-tailed Hawks, many species of ducks, three Yellow-headed Blackbirds, and many Purple Martins in Tofield.

There were some terrific displays at the Community Centre, including three live raptors from the Edmonton Valley Zoo; celebrated Canadian naturalist John Acorn, whose show, "Acorn the Nature Nut," my brothers and I loved when we were younger; a live garter snake (a female, approximately one metre long), scorpion, and Malaysian katydid, from the Royal Alberta Museum (RAM), shown by Pete Heule, the Museum's Bug Room Coordinator (we like his features on CBC radio); a live Burrowing Owl from the Beaverhill Bird Observatory, which I've just joined as a member; a Bugs & Beetles wetland display, including fairy shrimp, which I had never seen before; and animal pelts from Bill Abercrombie of Alberta Trapline Adventures.

One of my favourite exhibits was the mounted owls of Alberta, displayed by Jocelyn Hudon, curator of ornithology at the Royal Alberta Museum. I also found out that the RAM has a new exhibit, "Fashioning Feathers," about the dangerous connection between fashion and natural history, running until January 6, 2013, which I am very eager to see, especially because I read a little bit about the subject while researching the Carolina Parakeet for my 4H speech.

Mr. Parsons did a wonderful job organizing everything and also taking time out to welcome my family and me on what was such a busy day for him. It was also great to meet some of the other members of AlbertaBird – including John Acorn and Jocelyn Hudon – and put faces to the names. I had a terrific day and hope to go again next year!

### Charlotte Wasylik



*Photos of Charlotte with the Burrowing Owl by Alexander Wasylik*



More to come on the Snow Goose Chase in the next Parkland Naturalist.



*Charlotte with John Acorn*

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)

**Members' Photos**

***Herald Moth***



***Photo by Douglas Faulder***

***Ruby-throated Hummingbird***



***Photo by Bob Gehlert***

***Mountain Bluebird***



***Photo by Raymond Lee***

***Yellow-rumped Warbler***



***Photos by Janice Hurlburt***