

THE PARKLAND NATURALIST



OCTOBER—DECEMBER 2012

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EDMONTON NATURE CLUB

<http://www.edmontonnatureclub.ca>



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Mushroom Magic

Photos by Betty Fisher

“To see a world in a grain of sand
And a heaven in a wild flower,
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand
And eternity in an hour”
William Blake



Ringed Tubaria, *Tubaria confragosa*



Changing Pholiotas, *Pholiota mutabilis*



Yellowcups, *Bisporella citrina*



King Bolete, *Boletus edulis*



Netted Rhodotus, *Rhodotus palmatus*



Witches' Hats, *Hygrocybe conica*

Mushroom Magic

A mushroom is neither a plant nor an animal, but belongs to a third kingdom with other fungi such as moulds and yeasts. These small, mostly invisible life forms play a major role in our environment. Throughout history the seed crop fungal disease ergot has caused lethal epidemics and was perhaps the reason for the bizarre behaviour of “bewitched” people persecuted in Europe and Salem.

Fungi caused the devastating Irish Potato Famine, they cause athlete’s foot and ringworm, and derivatives have led to LSD and migraine relief products. Without them we would not have penicillin and cyclosporine, beer and wine, or bread and cinnamon rolls.

Visible mushrooms can appear suddenly, unexpectedly, and disappear as quickly. Ancient Greeks thought they came from the lightning of Zeus after rains, fairy rings were thought to have come from “the little people,” and hallucinogenic fungi have been called “the food of the Gods.”

Thousands of mushroom species exist, most not easily identifiable. Some are highly prized delicacies such as the truffle, morel, and chanterelle. Some are poisonous, with effects ranging from simple nausea and cramps to renal or kidney failure and death. The amanita Death Cap may be the most deadly fungus, with no known antidote.

A mushroom is the fruiting body of a fungus which develops to form thousands of spores for distribution. It may last for only a few days, but the underground mycelia network that produced it may cover thousands of acres and live for hundreds of years.

How fungi relate to other organisms in their environment depends on how they gain needed nutrients. Fungi such as the popular honey mushroom are parasitic, feeding on living matter and threatening the survival of the host. Most fungi are either saprophytic or mycorrhizal. Saprophytic or wood-decaying fungi break down dead organic matter and return nutrients to the soil. The oyster mushroom is a good wood destroyer. Mycorrhizal or symbiotic fungi form close mutually beneficial relationships with the roots of plants and trees, enabling essential elements and water to pass to the tree in exchange for food. These fungi are vitally important for the survival of a healthy forest. Without the part they play in the full carbon cycle, the world as we know it would not exist.

When the right conditions of nutrition, humidity, temperature, and light occur, the underground mycelia produce mushrooms that appear on the surface. This is what the mycologists tell us, but I prefer to think they are all brought about by “the little people.”

Betty Fisher



Comb Tooth, *Hericium coralloides*



Bleeding Mycena, *Mycena haematopus*

On the cover

Honey Mushrooms, *Armillaria mellea* - Photo by Betty Fisher

President's Message

Hi. I have the rare privilege to be involved in one of Edmonton's most dedicated volunteer organizations involved in all areas of nature and the sharing of its wonder. Our history in Edmonton goes back a long way, and I'm just beginning to appreciate the efforts of past and present members who have made and make the Edmonton Nature Club a truly dynamic, exciting, interesting, friendly, experience-sharing, and overall wonderful club and a key fabric in the Edmonton community.

On behalf of your executive and other involved members, I believe 2013 will be even more rewarding to you. Our recently revised by-laws have been accepted by Corporate Registries of Alberta, in large part due to the efforts of Marg Reine, Hendrick Kruger, Ron Ramsey, and James Fox. Ron and Alan Hingston have worked hard to develop an appealing and interesting indoor program with monthly speakers that in 2013 will be even more stimulating in the comfort of King's College. And don't forget all the members involved in making the Friday evenings so warm with cookies, coffee, and friendly conversations. In fact, that's how I got involved with the Club, after an informative discussion with Ron Ramsey. So, join us and share your thoughts and get involved.

Nature Network is a mastery of assembling information about our amazing field trips into a communications medium that is very readable and enticing. Thanks due to the efforts of many members, including Ann Carter, Lisa Priestley, Morvyn Patterson, James Fox, and our trip leaders. Study groups for birds, plants, spiders, and bugs attract many participants and are led by our dedicated members Ann Carter, Patsy Cotterill, and "vacant" (interested in volunteering?). Let's not forget our main man in communications,



Our President, Stephen Copen

James Fox, who has made ENC an email phenomenon. James also welcomes members at the monthly indoor program table along with Mark Demers, who gathers the donations that pay for the room rent and coffee.

Our annual Snow Goose Chase led by Bob Parsons continues to be a huge success. My first experience of this event was on a bus with friends born in Edmonton and from the Philippines. Gerald Romanchuk provided bird commentary and all of us were thoroughly delighted by seeing upwards of 50,000 Snow Geese and purple prairie crocus.

Our members are involved in community-based projects with a variety of organizations such as the Edmonton Area Land Trust and the City of Edmonton Biodiversity office and Parks. ENC is in good financial shape due in large part to the oversight of our Treasurer, Cecilia Rodriguez, and our membership is well supported by our Membership Secretary, Brian Stephens.

I could write pages more but I don't want to reduce the space for more interesting materials you will find in this issue of the *Parkland Naturalist*. I have missed so many

dedicated members who give their time to support our club. My THANKS to all.

For 2013, visit our ENC website managed by Herbert Taube, join us at the indoor meetings, study groups, annual banquet, and on our field trips. Welcome new, old, and non-members with the same enthusiasm and warmth with which I was welcomed, and be prepared for the Edmonton Nature Club to continue to be a true community of Edmontonians dedicated to our inspiring natural environment and the experiences and rewards it brings.

Stephen Copen

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Membership

Applications may be downloaded
 from the ENC website.

Membership Rates: Adult/family \$30/year
 Senior \$20/year
 Student \$20/year

Advertising rates

Business Card	\$15/1 issue	\$40/3 issues
Quarter page	\$30/1 issue	\$80/3 issues
Half page	\$45/1 issue	\$125/3 issues
Full page	\$80/1 issue	\$225/3 issues

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Edmonton Nature Club Yahoo Discussion Group

Notice to Nature Enthusiasts

- Find interesting local birds
- Share your nature photos
- Receive help with a bird ID
- Post your recent birding outing
- Discover links to fascinating nature sites
- Find maps of local birding areas
- Help us discover butterflies and more

Join our ENC Yahoo Discussion Group

linked from ENC website or Google search

“Yahoo Groups ENC Members”



Gerry Fox
Photo by Janice Hurlburt

Our ENC Discussion Group on Yahoo is now one year old. It is an interactive site where Edmonton Nature Club members and other nature enthusiasts can share information and provide feedback to the club. The Yahoo group has proven to be very popular with both novice and experienced participants. It has over 90 members and an average of more than 150 postings per month, including local sightings of mammals and birds, field trip reports, shared information and photos, species identifications, and some friendly discussion.

The site currently contains 40 photo albums with interesting shots from ENC field trips and many individual folders with some spectacular photographs. Our files section includes maps to local birding areas, local check-lists and arrival times, field trip reports, quizzes on species identification, and many other items of interest. There are links to other nature sites, a calendar of upcoming events and nature walks, and information about eBird.

You may access the site to read the postings, choose to receive individual e-mails instead, opt for a condensed daily digest, or ask to receive only special notices.

The club's photographers have sparked an interest in butterflies, moths, and other winged critters, and we hope to be able to do the same with plants. We are trying to encourage young naturalists to join our group, use the site, and participate in discussions.

The simplest way to join the discussion group is to click on the “Yahoo Groups Join Now!” icon on the Edmonton Nature Club website. You also could do a Google search for “Yahoo Groups ENC Members.” For anyone having difficulty joining the group, step-by-step guidelines will be available at ENC monthly meetings.

We welcome and look forward to your participation.

Gerry Fox

Online Discussion Group Coordinator

Why eBird?

If you want to keep your birding records in a safe place and want quick access to your sightings either in specific (When did I see that Goshawk?) or more general terms (When does migration peak here in the spring?), eBird can help. Not just a list of the species you've seen, eBird is a living archive of your birding history. Each part of your life list is interactive, so you can dig deeper and retrieve as much information as you'd like.

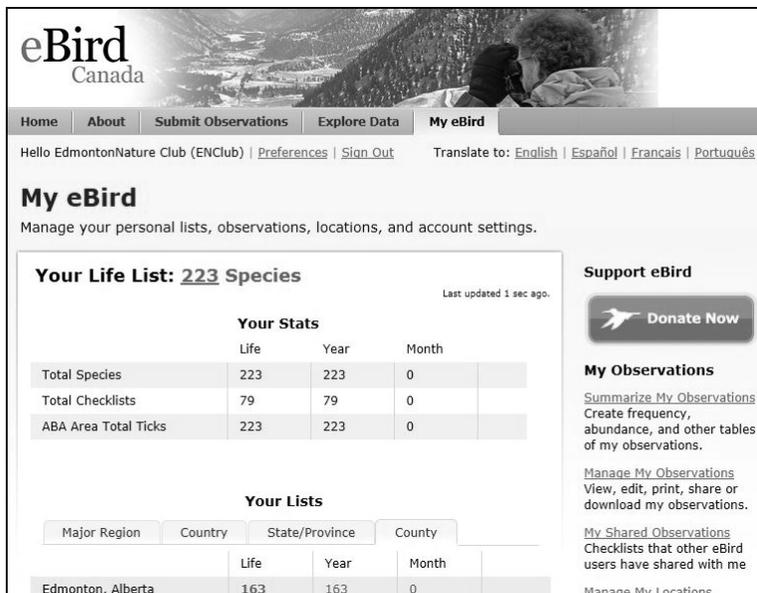
January is the perfect time to go to **eBird.ca** and “Register as a New User” on the **Home** page. Enter a user name, password, and your e-mail address. By becoming a registered user, you can enter your birding checklists under the **Submit Observations** tab to get your year list started online! This creates a **My eBird** page for you where all your data can be found and searched by you. Your year and life lists will be updated with every entry. Birders have the option of keeping the usual notebook and then entering the data later on the site, or for those who love technology, apps are available for smartphones that will upload checklist data at the touch of a button. Once you've submitted your list, you can share it with your birding companions for the day.

The **About eBird** section contains information on how the site works, what happens to your data, and how it may save our natural areas. On the right side-bar of the page is a link to a user tutorial that can help you get started.

The **Explore Data** tab allows you to request information from data submitted by others. You can search sightings in Edmonton or Alberta, across Canada, or around the world.

And yes, you can **load your old data**. Bring out those notebooks from that box in your basement and the ones from the back of your desk drawer. Submit that data and share it with birders, conservationists, and scientists around the world!

Ann Carter



eBird
Canada

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Your Life List: 223 Species Last updated 1 sec ago.

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	Life	Year	Month
Total Species	223	223	0
Total Checklists	79	79	0
ABA Area Total Ticks	223	223	0

Your Lists

Major Region	Country	State/Province	County	Life	Year	Month
				163	163	0

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Parkland Plant Notes

The Mystique of Mistletoes

With early snow covering most of our local vegetation, I was scrambling for ideas for a winter column on plants. By chance I came across an old clipping from an article in *Nature* magazine of December 1995. It was about New Zealand mistletoes (*Peraxilla* species), in which local birds were reported to twist the ripe flower buds to open them explosively, showering the bird with pollen (which promotes cross-pollination for the plant) and giving it access to a pristine source of nectar. The authors of this article concluded that the lamentable extinction of another species was due to a dearth of the appropriate birds. With Christmas approaching, I thought: a perfect topic, mistletoe and birds!

Did I say mistletoe, in the singular? Turns out there are hundreds of mistletoe species, some 1300, to be inexact. A little research revealed my great ignorance of this group of plants, but perhaps I have an excuse in that mistletoes mainly occur in warmer climes. Canada has only four native species, the Dwarf Mistletoes, in the genus *Arceuthobium*.

Mistletoes are shrubby, green, flowering plants that grow on the branches of trees which they parasitize. Being green, they can make their own carbohydrates through photosynthesis, but they tap into the conducting tissues (xylem) of their host by means of a root-like structure called a haustorium to withdraw water and mineral nutrients. Because of this they are partial or hemiparasites. Their fruits are sticky, usually one-seeded, “berries” that are eaten by many birds. You can imagine that as a plant living in a tree you’ll likely depend upon visitation by birds for pollination and especially for seed dispersal.

With so many species the mistletoes are clearly diverse taxonomically, although all fall within the botanical order of families called the Santanales. Mistletoes belong overwhelmingly to two major families within this order: the Loranthaceae, which tend to have showy, hermaphrodite flowers (male and female parts together in the same flower) that are adapted for insect or bird pollination, and the Viscaceae, with small, inconspicuous flowers that are unisexual, with both sexes borne on the same plant or male and female flowers produced on different mistletoe plants. (In the most recent taxonomic treatment the Viscaceae have been reduced from family status to that of a branch in the much larger family, Santalaceae.)

The Loranthaceae include some 900 species in 65 genera, and occur predominantly in southern lands that were once part of the ancient supercontinent of Gondwana (i.e., South America, Africa and Madagascar, India, Malesia, and Australasia). The Viscaceae, with 400 species in seven genera, are more northern in origin and distribution, corresponding with the northern supercontinent Laurasia, and are considered younger in evolutionary terms.

The European Mistletoe (*Viscum album*) is a member of the Viscaceae. It is familiar to most of us, at least from pictures, with its characteristic forked branching, paired oval leaves and white berries (on the female plants). This species is the source of the name mistletoe, whose etymology in turn is the Anglo-

Saxon *Mistel*. *Tan* undoubtedly means twig; but *Mistel* may come either from Old German *Mist*, meaning dung (a reference to the fact that the plant is spread from bird droppings), or from *Mistl*, meaning different, recognition that the parasite is clearly different from its host. The Mistle Thrush (*Turdus viscivorus*) of Eurasia gets its name from its habit of eating mistletoe berries.

The European Mistletoe is the subject of much folklore and the source of herbal remedies, almost none of which have stood the test of modern pharmacology. Apparently mistletoe did not become a part of Christmas traditions until the beginning of the 17th century, but the particularly English tradition of kissing under the mistletoe likely has its origin in the very ancient association of mistletoe with fertility.

Viscum album has a wide distribution across Eurasia and this is reflected in its various subspecies. It also infects a very large number of different host trees, although it particularly favours apple, poplar, and lime. It is most easily seen in the winter as clumps of green among the leafless branches of its deciduous hosts. Readers with connections to the southern part of the U.S. may be familiar with the exclusively New World species of *Phorodendron* (also in Viscaceae), particularly Eastern Mistletoe, *Phorodendron serotinum*, which like European Mistletoe is harvested commercially for the Christmas trade.

Also in the Viscaceae are the Dwarf Mistletoes, *Arceuthobium*, with the majority of the 26-odd species in the genus occurring in the western U.S. and central Mexico. They parasitize trees in the Pine (Pinaceae) and Cypress (Cupressaceae) families. Alberta’s only species, *Arceuthobium americanum*, American Dwarf Mistletoe, infects Jack Pine (*Pinus banksiana*) and Lodgepole Pine (*P. contorta*). On June 24 this year, we were able to take a close look at it during the field trip to Northwest Bruderheim Natural Area, where Jack Pine thrives on the sandy soil. Its presence can be detected from a distance because it causes “witches’ brooms” on the pine, an abnormal proliferation of thin twigs that of course provide more substrate for infection by the mistletoe.



Developing fruits of
Arceuthobium americanum,
North Bruderheim Natural Area, May 8, 2012

Much of the plant body in *Arceuthobium* is immersed within the tree tissue, and its relatively short emergent shoots and tiny, scale-like leaves likely compromise the plant’s ability to photosynthesize. In any event, it has been shown that adult dwarf mistletoes are unusual in taking carbohydrates from their hosts, as well as water and minerals. Another unusual feature is that

instead of being dispersed by birds, the fruits of *Arceuthobium* are ejected with tremendous force in an explosive mechanism, far enough for the seeds to land and germinate on other branches. Our local *Arceuthobium americanum* produces tiny yellow flowers in early May; male and female flowers are on separate mistletoe plants and cross-pollination is likely effected by insects. The fruit is a bluish-green oval “berry” containing a single seed enclosed in mucilage. (I’d be interested to hear from anyone making observations of pollinating insects, time of ripening of the fruits, and, of course, the explosive event!)



Male flowers of *Arceuthobium americanum* on Jack Pine, North Bruderheim Natural Area, May 8, 2012

Dwarf Mistletoes have been subjected to much research in North America because they parasitize commercially valuable conifers, reducing their growth, wood quality, longevity, and cone production. However, their control still consists largely of the time-honoured methods of pruning out infected branches and culling badly infested trees.

My limited acquaintance with Loranthaceae mistletoes has occurred during two visits to the south-east Australian state of Victoria. Here, I was fascinated to see huge clusters of branches hanging from many of the *Eucalyptus* trees. At first I thought these might just be abnormal growths of the trees, for the leaves were characteristically long, narrow, and hard like those of the rest of the tree, although denser and, depending on the *Eucalypt* species, somewhat different in colour. When I saw how many trees had them, and finally their clusters of brilliant orange-red flowers, I realized they were a type of mistletoe. I tentatively identified the species as *Amyema pendulum*. The beautiful, tubular, hon-



Amyema pendulum (mistletoe) on *Eucalyptus viminalis*, Mornington Peninsula, Victoria, Australia, October 17, 2010.

ey-suckle-like, nectar-containing flowers of *Amyema* species are pollinated by birds, particularly honeyeaters (Meliphagidae). Their fruits are eaten by birds, chiefly the Mistletoe Bird (*Dicaeum hirundinaceum*), which defecates the sticky seeds unharmed, thereby dispersing them. The striking similarity of this *Amyema* species and others to its hosts is an example of host mimicry, which apparently is common among mistletoes. Several untested theories have been advanced to explain the adaptive advantages of host mimicry, which may also serve to make the parasite less obvious. One is that the host tree provides a visual cue to the birds, which then search the tree for the mistletoe fruits; later they move to search another tree of the same kind, making it more likely that defecated seeds will arrive on an appropriate host. My first thought was that given the marvelous adaptations of *Eucalypt* leaves to reducing water loss in dry environments, similar features might also be adaptive for the mistletoe. However, since mimicry is widespread among various species and hosts, this cannot be an adequate explanation.

It’s clear that the mystique of mistletoes extends far beyond their strange lifestyles and (for the European Mistletoe) folkloric connections through the mists of time. Worldwide, mistletoes provide fertile areas of study for scientists and naturalists alike. And, as understanding increases, mistletoes’ value as important components of ecosystems is beginning to be realized. Australian workers, for example, now recognize that as well as food, they provide shelter and nesting habitat for birds and other arboreal animals.

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Amyema pendulum on *Eucalyptus ovata*, Mornington Peninsula, Victoria, Australia, October 17, 2010.

What's Bugging You?

Moths in Alberta

If all mankind were to disappear, the world would regenerate back to the rich state of equilibrium that existed ten thousand years ago. If insects were to vanish, the environment would collapse into chaos. E. O. Wilson.

Over 160,000 species of moths exist worldwide, and new species are found and described every day. Moths are significant pollinators and an important food source for many bats and birds. Several species of moth larvae are farmed for silk, and a species is used as food by people in South Africa.

Contrary to popular belief, moths are just as important, beautiful, and interesting as butterflies. How do you tell the difference between a moth and a butterfly? Many people think that moths are gray and drab, exclusively nocturnal, and very boring in comparison to butterflies. However, moths are extremely diverse in colour and shape. The best way to tell a butterfly and moth apart is by looking at their antennae. A butterfly has clubbed antennae, while a moth has feathered or threadlike antennae.

Many moth larvae are considered pests; they can cause considerable crop and plant damage that reduces harvests. Moths are also objects of folklore, superstition, and symbolism that further tarnish their reputation. Caterpillars of moths are diverse and very interesting. Many species are well known and often have specific plant hosts; other species are very poorly understood.

You may have heard the terms *micro moths* and *macro moths*. Micro moths are fairly small and more primitive, although a few species are large enough to be confused with macro moths. They are more difficult to identify, and often dissection is required. Macro moths are relatively larger and have diverged more recently. Taxonomy orders species according to their evolutionary age, with the oldest groups presented first, and the youngest (those that have diverged more recently) last.

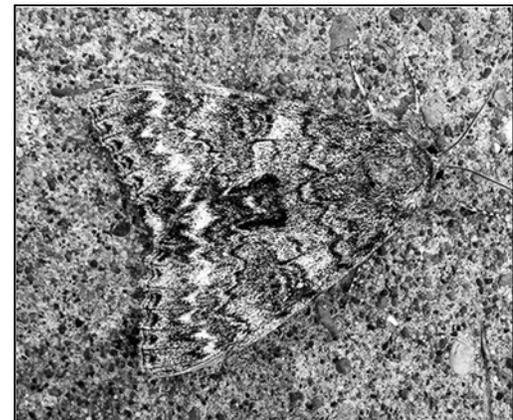
One of the most commonly recognized caterpillars, here in Alberta, is the Spotted Tussock Moth. The yellow and black fuzzy caterpillar of this species is often called a "Woolly Bear." Although it is cute and fuzzy, the name Woolly Bear is intended for another species, the black and red *Pyrrharctia isabella*.

The fuzzy hairs (setae) of these caterpillars are irritating and unpleasant, the perfect defense against predators. They also provide protection against parasitic wasps and flies by making it difficult for them to get close enough to the insect's body to deposit their eggs. The bright and contrasting colouration of these caterpillars is an active means of defense called aposematic colouration. After getting a mouthful of hair, a predator will not soon forget the distastefulness of one of these caterpillars or its bright warning colours.

Although many moths are nocturnal, several species are active during the day (diurnal) or at dawn and dusk (crepuscular). Nocturnal moths can be found during the day hidden under rock ledges, in bark crevices, and among shrubs and grasses. They are masters of camouflage; their cryptic colouration is another adaptive defense. This Once-Married Underwing (*Catacala unijuga*) almost completely blends in with the foundation of a house. In flight, however, one flash of its beautiful pinkish-red hindwing quickly reveals its location.



Spotted Tussock Moth (*Lophocampa maculate*)



Once-Married Underwing (*Catacala unijuga*)

Like butterflies, moths have a complete life cycle (egg, larva, pupa, adult). In moths, the pupal stage is called a cocoon, not a chrysalis. Several species of moths don't feed as adults and lack mouthparts. The Four-Spotted Ghost Moth (*Sthenopis purpurascens*) feeds exclusively as a larva on the roots of poplar, alder, and willow trees. These are primitive moths: the females actually release eggs in flight. They are crepuscular and often found in mating swarms at dusk.

Moths that feed as adults have mouthparts much like those of butterflies. The Hummingbird Clearwing (*Hemaris thysbe*) belongs in the Sphinx moth family. It is often found nectaring at flowers during the day, unlike its Sphinx moth relatives that lack mouthparts and prefer the night. People have mistaken this moth for a hummingbird because it has a fuzzy plump body and hovers at flowers much like a hummingbird.



Four-Spotted Ghost Moth (*Sthenopis purpurascens*)



Maple Spanworm Moth (*Prochoerodes transversata*)



Hummingbird Clearwing Moth (*Hemaris thysbe*) on Common Lilac

Another adaptation observed in moths is mimesis. Moths and their larvae often hide in plain sight and mimic natural objects such as dead leaves or small twigs. Although the Maple Spanworm Moth (*Prochoerodes transversata*, a geometrid) shown in the picture does not blend well into the grass, it was extremely difficult to see, as the site included leaf litter.

Briseis Underwing (*Catacala briseis*)



Underwings rest with flat wings, so as not to reveal the bold colouration of their hindwing. They are medium to large in size, and are attracted to both light traps and sugar bait. Most species of Underwing larvae feed on poplar locally. It is such a surprise to see the flash of their boldly coloured underwing.

White Underwing (*Catacala relictata*)



Also called Hawk Moths, the Sphinx moths are probably the most easily recognized by beginners. The One-Eyed Sphinx Moth (*Smerinthus cerysi*) has no mouthparts as an adult. All insects that lack mouthparts as adults live off reserves stored up while they live as caterpillars. When disturbed, the One-Eyed Sphinx reveals the eye-spots on its hindwings, imitating the eyes of a much larger animal to frighten away potential predators.

One-Eyed Sphinx (*Smerinthus cerysi*)



The Gallium Sphinx Moth (*Hyles gallii*) is an amazing flyer and beautiful moth. Unlike the One-Eyed Sphinx, the Gallium Sphinx is sometimes observed nectaring at flowers during the day and often mistaken for its cousin, the Hummingbird Clearwing, or an actual hummingbird. It is named after gallium or bedstraw, the larval host plant.

Gallium Sphinx (*Hyles gallii*)



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Shelley Ryan-Hovind

(With the exception of the Four-Spotted Ghost Moth, all photos were taken by Shelley Ryan-Hovind.)

Editorial

The Parkland Naturalist format has changed slightly. I moved the Executive listing to page 5 across from the President's Message, so page 3 can have a feature article to go with color photos on page 2. I hope you will enjoy the diversity of articles and photos. If you have a story and/or photos you would like to share, please contact the editor. We have some new authors and photographers contributing in this issue which I am sure you will appreciate. The printing of this issue was delayed to try and include as many Christmas Bird Count results as possible. The next issue will be January–April 2013. The deadline for submissions is March 30, 2013.

We welcome Stephen Copen (see page 4), the new President of the Edmonton Nature Club. Stephen has jumped right in and sent an interesting article all about the various Kobuk Valley Inuit terminology for "snow". His article is on page 14. Our columnists and our regular contributors Dick Dekker and Ludo Bogaert have sent in their always interesting articles. Thank you all. Also, as ever, a big thank you to Judy Johnson, our copy editor, and Dick and Pat Clayton for mailing and distribution. **Happy New Year!**

Dawne Colwell, editor PN (colwelld@shaw.ca)

After fledging two young of their own, a pair of nesting Swainson's Hawks successfully adopted three orphans.

Edmonton's well-known raptor bander Hardy Pletz, who played a pivotal role in the adoption of an orphaned eaglelet by a pair of Bald Eagles nesting in the city (described in the previous *Parkland Naturalist*) has saved the lives of three young hawks that lost their parents.

On August 17, 2012, the Wildlife Rehabilitation Society phoned Hardy to say that an Alberta Fish and Wildlife officer had dropped off a juvenile Swainson's Hawk that was picked up from a sidewalk at 119 Avenue and 70 Street. Apparently it dropped down from a nest in a tall spruce tree on the front lawn of a house. According to a neighbour, two or more of its siblings had already fledged and disappeared, but the adult hawks had not been seen for awhile.

Hardy took the youngster to Strathcona Science Park, where he had been watching a Swainson's Hawk nest over the course of the summer. On July 13, he banded the two young, which were then about 25 days old. When he arrived on August 17, these young had flown, but they were still around. One of them briefly landed on the nest, 22 feet up in a spruce tree. Climbing to it on his aluminum ladder, Hardy carefully placed the orphan on its new home. He also left a supply of fresh hawk food, including two dead quail and several mice.

On that same day, Hardy received a second call from the

Wildlife Rehabilitation Society, again requesting his help with young Swainson's Hawks that had lost their parents. The location was an industrial area in Nisku, and the nest was in a spruce tree across the road from Lory Oilfield Rentals. Company personnel had observed the hawks with interest until the adults seemed to disappear. For several days, perhaps as long as a week, the young had been calling for food from the nest. When Hardy removed the starving birds, and while he still had them in hand, they swallowed several mice without hesitation.

The fate of one of the parents, and perhaps both of them, turned out to have been a shocking accident. The adult male had been electrocuted and was found below a power transmission pylon. Feathers aflame, his burning carcass had actually started a grass fire.

On August 18, Hardy took the two orphans to Strathcona Science Park and placed them on the hawk nest in the spruce tree, next to the orphan already there. Five days later, to his great satisfaction, he saw all five youngsters in the immediate area, either on the wing or perched on poles. On September 17, to give the family a head start the following year, Hardy and a friend underpinned the rather flimsy nest with a wire platform. By way of a thank-you, one of the adult hawks dive-bombed the men until they climbed down and left.

Dick Dekker



In 2010, Swainson's Hawks were creating a public nuisance at two sites in Edmonton by attacking people who came too close to their nest. Requested to deal with the problem, Hardy Pletz removed the young and fostered them into other nests outside the city.



The nest of a pair of Swainson's Hawks in Strathcona Science Park, in which Hardy Pletz placed three orphaned youngsters. The bulging crop of the topmost bird shows how well Hardy fed it before release.

Photos by Hardy Pletz

Kobuk Valley Inuit – Terminology for Snow

So! Are you dreaming of green lawns and warmer temperatures? Well, we in Edmonton have a season of winter white filled with wonderment! Dress up warm and walk in one of Edmonton’s parks or natural areas and begin to look at “snow” in a different way. Use the names for snow and find a warmth that snow and winter bring to the soul. Snow is more than “snow”!

Over the years I have developed an appreciation for snow by using the Kobuk Valley Inuit terms, looking at snow crystals and layering and reading about the white covering so beneficial for plants and animals. Many colleagues have offered their insights and knowledge to enhance my winter experiences. Perhaps, these snow terms will help you enjoy our most exciting and varied season!

Stephen Copen

Word for Snow

Pronunciation

Meaning



Annui

AN-e-U

Falling snow



Qali

KAL-i

Snow that sticks to horizontal surfaces such as branches of trees and fence posts



Anymanya

AN-ya-Man-ya

Hollow formed behind object in path of snow



Siqoqtoaq

See-KO-to-AQ

Sun crust



Api

Ah-Pee

Snow sitting on the ground



Kanik

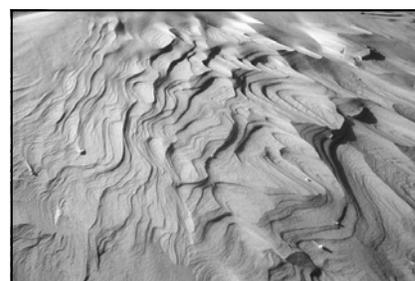
KAH-nik

Snow frozen to upright surfaces after wet storm



Det Thtok

Snow so deep snowshoes are required

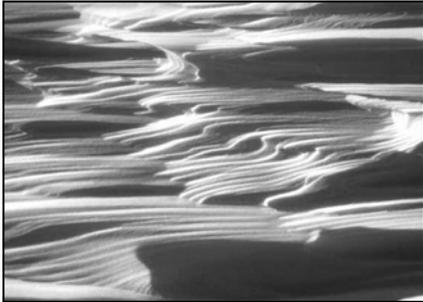


Siqoq

See-KOK

Snow blowing along the ground-snake-drifting

All photos are from the internet. As far as can be determined, they are not copyright protected.



Kimoaqruk

kee-mo-AK-ruk

Finger drifts downwind from objects low to surface of snow



Mapsuk

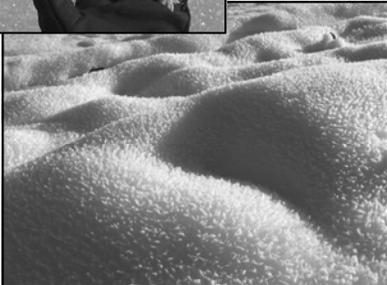
map-suck

An overhanging drift of snow

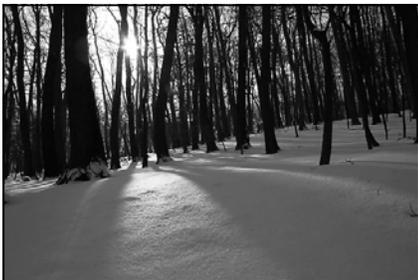


Pukak

pu-KAK



Depth hoar at the meeting of ground surface and snow layer



Upsik

OOP-sik

Wind hardened snow



Qamaniq

KA-man-ik

Bowl-shaped depression in snow around base of trees



20% OFF one regularly-priced non-bird food item*

*Valid only on non-bird food items at the participating store listed. One discount per purchase. Offer not valid on previous purchases, optics, gift cards, Daily Savings Club memberships, Brome Bird Care branded feeders or sale items. Offer expires Feb 28, 2013.



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Chasing Birds

Counting Birds for Christmas

Did you say two thousand Snow Buntings? Really? I thought there were at least two billion! Obviously, I've never been much of a bird counter. The Christmas Bird Count season does get me into that way of thinking, though. Most years I do about six different counts. Been everything from just another bush beater to zone captain to count compiler.

We all tell ourselves, or at least I tell myself, the main reason to participate in the counts is to contribute to citizen science. You know, to do our part in helping to understand trends in bird populations. But I know the real truth. The REAL reason for doing the counts is to find good birds. Better birds than anyone else. Or at the very least to get more species than your buddy over in the next zone. Competitive? Not really!

Each of the six counts I do has a different feel. The first one of the year is usually Fort Saskatchewan. The naturalist group out in the Fort is fairly small; they usually have fewer than 20 counters. Most of the folks out there aren't real avid birders, so when a crazy bird-nut like me shows up, he gets treated like an all-star. Puts the pressure on to find something good. Luckily, they're easy to please!

The Edmonton count is always the next day. So after the all-star treatment, it's a shock to the system to go back to being a small fish in a big pond. A couple of years ago I ended up becoming a zone captain. Zone 5 was Dave Nadeau's for many years until, sadly, he passed away. I inherited what was always a great zone, but somehow have had no luck in finding anything really earth shattering out there.

After a couple of days off, Boxing Day is traditionally the day for Elk Island. The Friends of Elk Island run the count. I usually take a group from the ENC to cover a few areas a little off the beaten track. Who likes maintained trails, right? My main goal out there is to find out who the real die-hards are. First we trudge over the snow- and ice-covered Astotin Lake to get out to Long Island. Then we do the steeplechase over all the deadfall on the heavily wooded island. It's pretty gruelling and a lot of people only come out once – or even quit halfway through! But a few gluttons for punishment keep coming back.

The Strathcona Count is very different, almost all birding by car, covering farmland and acreages. The birding is usually pretty routine. The main source of entertainment is making sure we beat Ray Cromie's crew in the next zone. The phone calls start around noon. It can be a bit of a poker game. Some cards need to be played close to the

vest. The best birds (or cards) are best played at the end of the day. Lots of insults are exchanged. Talk of "alleged" birds or "unconfirmed" sightings, MOSTLY said in fun!

The Wabamun Count has changed over the years. With the closing of the Wabamun Power Plant and tighter security at Sundance, it's become difficult to pick up the waterfowl that the Wab Count was always famous for. Wabamun always used to attract all the real all-stars in the local birding community. That has faded a bit, but the area still offers some good winter birding. I inherited a zone that includes Seba Beach, and my crew has come up with some nice stuff: Great Gray Owl, Northern Pygmy Owl, Townsend's Solitaire, etc. We usually get a few of the harder-to-find birds such as Brown Creeper and Golden-crowned Kinglet.

The last count of the year for me is Opal. This count has never been advertised much. The compiler is pretty lazy, and the fewer counters there are, the less paperwork he has to do. You get three guesses to figure out who that is.... I reluctantly took over the job a few years back. We started the count about eight years ago in the midst of a major Northern Hawk Owl irruption. A world record 40 Hawk Owls were seen that incredible year, but two or three have become the norm since then. Northern owls are, of course, the major attraction of doing a count up there. We've never been skunked on Hawk Owls and have always had at least one Great Gray until last year when we finally got shut out on the big guys.

At the beginning of the count season I'm always excited and ready to go. After doing a lot of hiking on both the Fort and Edmonton counts, the enthusiasm starts to wane a bit. By the time Opal comes up, there better be some owls or something good, because I'm sick to death of counting magpies! But by next count season we'll be ready to get at it again.

Gerald Romanchuk



Black-billed Magpie
Photo by Gerald Romanchuk



*Crossing Astotin Lake,
Elk Island Christmas Bird Count 2011*



*Exploring the Sandhills area,
Elk Island Christmas Bird Count 2012*

**Photos by
Gerald Romanchuk**

Long Island - Elk Island CBC 2012



Ron Ramsey: In Appreciation

We all acknowledge that it is the volunteers who make this club successful, but I would like to take this opportunity to thank Ron Ramsey for serving as the president of the Edmonton Nature Club for the last five years. Even with all the volunteers, it still takes a leader to keep the organization running.

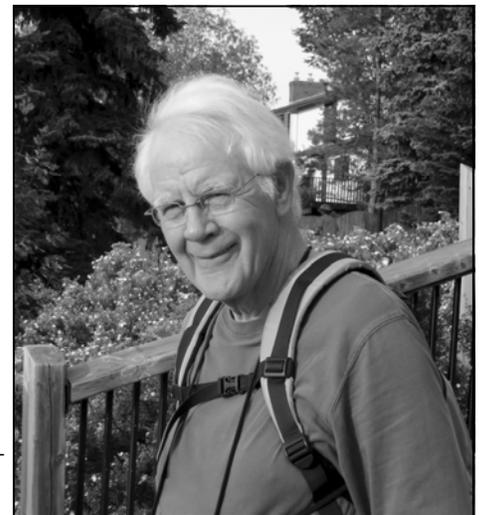
Ron stepped up to the plate to take over from Bob Parsons and jumped in feet first to an executive position. Ron had been doing the communication for three years, advertising our meetings and distributing posters. He also looked after the pre-meeting refreshments with his wife Marlene.

Ron took on the job of the presidency with the same commitment and dedication that he demonstrated as communications chair. He conducted more meetings via e-mail to cut down on the monthly executive meetings and enlisted many volunteers into club positions. I say the presidency is a job because many people are not aware of the number of things presidents are expected to do. They not only run the executive meetings and introduce the monthly meetings; they also represent the club at many activities in which the ENC is asked to participate. They attend stakeholder meetings for the city and surrounding municipalities, provide information relative to displays at city events, write briefs or letters on issues that concern our club, attend city hall meetings to present a brief, or enlist others to assist in meeting these commitments.

For decades the city has invited our club and its members to participate in various activities, and it respects what our club and its members have to offer.

It is people like Ron, and many before him, and the many who will follow, that have made our club what it is today and what it will be into the future – for another hundred years of our history! We want to express our appreciation for all Ron has done for our club and to thank Marlene for her support in enabling him to commit to this position.

Marg Reine



Past President Ron Ramsey

The Edmonton Nature Club Indoor Meetings, Fall 2012

Dr. Stephen Fleming

The Edmonton Nature Club (ENC) welcomed Dr. Stephen Fleming, Superintendent of Elk Island National Park, as its opening speaker on October 19, 2012, to start the fall indoor meetings. His talk, *Bison: The Centennial Legacy of Elk Island National Park*, gave a fascinating account of the management of a herd of bison which, since 1907, has led the park to become an exporter of bison and able to provide breeding stock as far afield as Siberia.

The cultural history of the bison is well known: herds which numbered an estimated 60 million once roamed the prairies, providing for most of the needs of an aboriginal people who were dependent on them. This all changed in the mid- to late-1800s, with European immigration into the West and settlement leading to eradication of the bison. By 1907 there were barely 200 bison left in the wild, with small remnant populations in Montana and Oklahoma only.

In the Beaverhills area, the elk weren't doing well either, and in 1906 five local people secured a \$5,000 bond and fenced an area around Astotin Lake to establish a game park to protect the last of the elk. Down south in Montana, the last remaining buffalo herd, the Pablo Allard herd, occupied a grazing reserve, but as the size of the reserve was to be reduced, the herd could not stay. In 1907 the Government of Canada purchased 410 animals at a cost of \$245 per head with a view to moving them to a newly established Buffalo National Park in Wainwright. As the park in Wainwright was not ready, these animals were brought by train to Lamont and released into the Elk Island enclosure. A year later they were rounded up and transported to Wainwright...only they couldn't all be caught, so a number remained behind in Elk Island and formed the original breeding stock for all the animals that have been raised there in the last 100 years.

The animals north of Highway 16 are plains bison. In 1965 the last of the pure-bred wood bison were brought to Elk Island and released south of the highway to keep them separate from the plains bison. With no large predators, the numbers of bison increase and have to be managed. The carrying capacity of the roughly 200 square kilometre national park is 350 bison, allowing 100–200 animals to be “surplused” each year. Many of the plains bison can be returned to areas such as the American Prairie Reserve in northeast Montana, but there are fewer large areas capable of receiving wood bison. Some have gone to Alaska, but more recently wood bison have been shipped to Yakutsk in Siberia.

Dr. Fleming described the manner in which the bison are “rounded-up” by being lured into pastures and then funnelled into a state-of-the-art handling facility where the animals can be weighed, tagged, tested, treated, and certified as disease-free for shipping. Stephen was along for the ride and showed us a number of pictures of a long day which started with wood bison being transported to Edmonton Airport and ended up with them being turned out onto suitable habitat in Siberia. Some of the problems in keeping thirty animals, each weighing about 900 kg, secure and fed in a temperature-controlled environment in the belly of a transport plane provided interesting viewing. Although the wood bison are not native to Siberia, they do augment the biodiversity of the region and recreate an ecosystem analogous to that which existed before the extinction of the steppe bison.

Sarina Loots

ENC members will recall the famous “Duck Trial” of 2010 in which Syncrude was found at fault in allowing 1,600 ducks to land on its

Aurora tailings ponds in the spring of 2008. The creative sentencing and fines imposed led to the establishment of the Research on Avian Protection Project (RAPP), a collaborative effort by industry, government, and the University of Alberta to prevent such incidents from occurring in the future. Our speaker on November 16, Sarina Loots, is a master's degree student at the university researching instrument-based monitoring techniques, notably radar and photography, to judge their effectiveness in alerting oil sands operators to the presence of migrating waterfowl in the area.

Sarina likened the aims of RAPP to those of bird-watchers in the inherent difficulty of locating birds and the challenges to our ability: what do you see, where are they, and how many are there? Once birds are detected, more questions arise: what species are they, where do they land, and what happens to them?

Radar is a well known technique for detecting birds in the air; however, being dependent on a beam, it cannot detect at all levels or on the ground. With the radar, Sarina described in some detail the difference between a false positive and a false negative. The false positive (we think there is a bird, but it turns out not to be true) is better detection than a false negative (there is a bird, but it is not detected). It is also evident that an on-demand deterrent system triggered by radar detection is more effective than a continual barrage of cannons to which the birds become habituated.

As noted, radar does not detect landed birds, but Sarina showed digital photos taken at considerable distances (over a kilometre) in which skilled observers could still identify the bird species and numbers. The tailings ponds present considerable difficulties to detectability: visibility is often poor and the embanked steep sides of the ponds present landscape challenges. A likely outcome of the research is that a combination of all three techniques – radar, photography, and observers – would provide the most effective early warning system to activate the deterrent system.

Dr. Richard Knapton

Our final meeting of 2012 was the ever-popular Birds of Christmas, hosted by the Edmonton Christmas Bird Count compiler, Kim Blomme. This year's count was dedicated to Joy and Cam Finlay, well-known Edmonton naturalists who live in Victoria, BC. Cam might be considered the father of the modern-day Edmonton Christmas Bird Count (CBC), as it was under his leadership that 1,266 people participated in the Edmonton CBC in 1987. Most years since then the Edmonton count has topped the list for participants in the approximately 2,000 counts held across North America.

Our Birds of Christmas speaker was Richard Knapton, co-owner and tour guide leader with Eagle-Eye Tours, who also leads a number of local field trips for the ENC. In a whirlwind presentation, Richard took us on tour with him to Costa Rica, Chile, Taiwan, and California. “Target” birds ranged from owls (Costa Rica) to mountain-top pheasants (Taiwan) to pelagic species (Chile) to shorebirds at Monterey (California). Each adventure was illustrated with Richard's photos and lively commentary.

We are only at the halfway point in the indoor meetings, and four meetings are still to come. Check the *Nature Network* for details: meetings are held on the third Friday of the month at Kings University College, 9125 50 Street, at 7:00 p.m. for refreshments, and everyone is welcome.

Alan Hingston

T'was the Night Before Bird Count

The following poem was written in recognition of the many years that Peter DeMulder has been involved with the Edmonton and St. Albert Christmas Bird Counts. Peter has taken part in the Edmonton CBC since 1964 and was captain of Zone 11 for many years. In 1992 he organized the first Christmas Bird Count in St Albert; he was compiler for the first 12 years and has been captain of Zone 3 every year.

T'was the night before Bird Count, and all thru Fairhaven
not a creature was stirring, not even the wisemen.*

The feeders were hung on the arbour with care,
in hopes that the finches would soon show up there.
Balls of suet were nestled all snug in their nets.
Visions of woodpeckers...we all had our bets!

And Mama in her nightie and I with my "bins"
had just settled down with the quilt to our chins
when out on the driveway arose such a clatter,
I sprang from my bed to see what was the matter.

Away to the window I flew like a flash,
tore open the shutters and threw up the sash.
The moon on the breast of the new-fallen snow
gave a luster of midday to objects below.

When, what to my wondering eyes should appear,
but a shiny new van, going in highest gear,
holding eight avid birders, all decked out in fur,
with a leader I knew must be P. DeMulder.

More rapid than eagles, his helpers they came,
and he whistled and shouted and called them by name,
"Now Alan, now Stoker, now Bob Lane and Stan G.,
on Ludo, on Hank P., on Gerald and Percy.

"To the top of the house, and to the deck wall,
now throw out seed, throw out seed, throw out seed all.
This yard must be covered with sunflower seeds,
and after that, lots of that nyjer stuff please."

And then in a twinkle, I heard on the roof,
the walking and stomping of each human hoof.
They spread peanut butter all over the place,
and I drew in my head, lest they cover my face!

DeMulder was shaking all over with glee.
He just couldn't wait to tell lovely Deirdre,
"The seeds attract mice, and mice the Barred Owl,

and so on Bird Count Day, we'll see lots of fowl!"

Peter continued, "This year we won't freeze,
and I know our Zone 3 will see the most species.
The Grouse and the Goldfinch, for sure, will be seen,
because of my super and hot Birding Team!"

He sprang to the van, to his team gave a whistle,
and away they all sped, like the down on a thistle,
and I heard him exclaim as they drove out of sight,
"Happy Bird Count to all, and to all a Good Night!"

*The wisemen are three local birders who regularly come to our acreage in Fairhaven, west of St. Albert, and yes, the Ruffed Grouse and American Goldfinches were both seen in the 2011 Bird Count.

Jack and Pauline DeHaas



Peter DeMulder
Photos by Gerald Romanchuk

Christmas Bird Counts

This year's Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs) for the Edmonton area continue a fine tradition that began more than a century ago in 1906, when Sidney Stansell, a teacher and naturalist, undertook the first Edmonton count. Although Alberta's capital city reported only six counts scattered between 1906 and 1954, local naturalists have continuously held these seasonal counts from 1955 on. Some readers may not be aware that Edmonton still holds the world record for participants on a CBC of 1,288, set in 1987. In most years since 1987, Edmonton has been first or second in number of participants for any count world-wide. Coinciding with the organizational efforts made for Edmonton in 1987 has been an increased effort to promote and coordinate counts in the surrounding area. This cooperation continues, and as the results reported for this year clearly show, the Edmonton region remains a hotbed of birding activity.

Each year, more than 40 CBCs occur in Alberta, and these counts contribute to the immense database managed and analyzed by the National Audubon Society and Bird Studies Canada. Last year, 410 counts were run in Canada, 1,739 in the United States, and 99 in Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Pacific Islands. A new record total of 63,227 participants (in the field and at feeders) was recorded. To date, more than 200 peer-reviewed articles have been published using Christmas Bird Count data. As the largest citizen-science project in the world, the Christmas Bird Count continues to be of immense value in our monitoring and conservation of birds. Makes having an enjoyable winter day out watching the birds seem like quite a noble pursuit!

Dave Ealey

Edmonton CBC 13S Zone Captain

Short-eared Owl, Photo by Steve Knight



Edmonton, December 16, 2012

Here are the final numbers for the
Edmonton Christmas Bird Count:

Total species: 60
Bush-beaters: 130

Feeder-watchers: 342
Total participants: 472

A List Species

Mallard, 1,476
Common Goldeneye, 91
Northern Goshawk, 7
Merlin, 28
Gray Partridge, 41
Ruffed Grouse, 2
Rock Pigeon, 3,863
Great Horned Owl, 6
Snowy Owl, 2
Northern Saw-whet Owl, 3
Downy Woodpecker, 407
Hairy Woodpecker, 76
Three-toed Woodpecker, 1
Northern Flicker, 104
Pileated Woodpecker, 65
Blue Jay, 505
Black-billed Magpie, 2,291
American Crow, 32

Common Raven, 878
Black-capped Chickadee, 4,267
Boreal Chickadee, 48
Red-breasted Nuthatch, 506
White-breasted Nuthatch, 295
Brown Creeper, 10
Golden-crowned Kinglet, 6
American Robin, 52
Bohemian Waxwing, 4,652
Cedar Waxwing, 16
Northern Shrike, 5
European Starling, 96
Dark-eyed Junco, 240
Pine Grosbeak, 341
White-winged Crossbill, 9
Common Redpoll, 2,066
Pine Siskin, 222
House Sparrow, 4,809

B List Species

Canada Goose, 2
Lesser Scaup, 6
Common Merganser, 2
*Bald Eagle, 4
Cooper's Hawk, 2
Rough-legged Hawk, 1
Gyrfalcon, 1
Short-eared Owl, 1
Barred Owl, 1
Boreal Owl, 3
Townsend's Solitaire, 2
American Tree Sparrow, 9
White-throated Sparrow, 5
White-crowned Sparrow, 2

Purple Finch, 2(?)
House Finch, 973
Red Crossbill, 8
Hoary Redpoll, 28
Evening Grosbeak, 24
American Goldfinch, 3

*settled on 4 although there
were 9 sightings over the
course of the day

C List Species

Prairie Falcon, 1, possibly 2
Belted Kingfisher, 1
Varied Thrush, 1
Chipping Sparrow, 1
Northern Hawk Owl, 1

Kim Blomme

Fort Saskatchewan, December 15, 2012

Total species: 26
Participants: 16

Bald Eagle, 3	Common Raven, 74
Merlin, 3	Black-capped Chickadee, 217
Gray Partridge, 13	Boreal Chickadee, 8
Rock Pigeon, 349	Red-breasted Nuthatch, 6
Great Horned Owl, 1	White-breasted Nuthatch, 13
Snowy Owl, 7	Golden-crowned Kinglet, 2
Downy Woodpecker, 18	Bohemian Waxwing, 1,271
Hairy Woodpecker, 10	Snow Bunting, 283
Northern Flicker, 1	American Tree Sparrow, 6
Pileated Woodpecker, 1	Pine Grosbeak, 88
Northern Shrike, 1	Common Redpoll, 442
Blue Jay, 38	Hoary Redpoll, 8
Black-billed Magpie, 291	House Sparrow, 160

During Count Week we also saw a Gyrfalcon and European Starling.

We didn't get our normal waterbird counts at the bend in the North Saskatchewan at the southwest perimeter of the circle this year, likely because of the odd rapid freeze-up of the river this winter (extended warm ice-free weather followed by a rapid bone-chilling cold, resulting in large blocks of ice damming up at the bend and eliminating any chance of open water remaining).

Also, observations from the north and northeast zones of the circle indicate a reduction in species diversity and numbers in both areas, likely due in part at least to increased industrial activity and upgrader development (private holding buyouts and "islanding" of habitat). Recent wildfires in both areas could also be causative.

Art Hughes

Devon, December 22, 2012

Total species: 37
Total individuals: 4,674
Participants: 38

Thanks again to everyone who was able to help us with this record-breaking year! We had a wonderful turnout, especially thanks to Ann Carter's team from the Edmonton Nature Club along with our local bird enthusiasts and feeder watchers. We had all zones covered this year, a first for me since I took over from Ian Tichkowsky in 2011.

In summary, a total of 4,565 birds were observed during the count thanks to the help of 38 volunteers who covered 650 km and donated over 50 hours of their time. This is the best turnout that we have ever had; the next closest was 33 in 2001! Of those birds counted, the highest count was

of Bohemian Waxwings, which topped the list at 2,420 individuals; they were feeding primarily in Devon in huge flocks. We added one new species to our list this year, a lone Prairie Falcon observed by Martin Sharp in zone 10. We have now added this to our rare species list, the C list. This brings to our CBC list to 69 since we started in 1988. In addition to this new discovery we observed 5 other rare species on our C list: a Bald Eagle and a American Tree Sparrow in zone 1 spotted by Gerry and James Fox, a Sharp-shinned Hawk I stumbled across in zone 6 by the creek in the Lion's Park, a Northern Hawk Owl seen by Harry Colquhoun in zone 9, and a Red Crossbill observed in zone 5 by Don Kenyon and Jenise Bidulock. A surprise to us this year was the absence of Evening Grosbeaks. This species was common in our counts, but it appears that the population has left our region for the time being, a trend reported across Canada and in last year's Bird Studies Canada CBC report. This is the first time in our history we have not observed this species.

Ruffed Grouse, 1	Boreal Chickadee, 12
Bald Eagle, 1	Red-breasted Nuthatch, 13
Sharp-shinned Hawk, 1	White-breasted Nuthatch, 35
Northern Goshawk, 3	Brown Creeper, 1
Prairie Falcon, 1	American Robin, 4
Rock Pigeon, 42	European Starling, 17
Great Horned Owl, 1 (count week)	Bohemian Waxwing, 2,420
Northern Hawk Owl, 1 (count week)	Snow Bunting, 5
Barred Owl, 1	American Tree Sparrow, 1
Downy Woodpecker, 72	Dark-eyed Junco, 15
Hairy Woodpecker, 21	Pine Grosbeak, 156
Northern Flicker, 1 (count week)	House Finch, 85
Pileated Woodpecker, 8	Red Crossbill, 1
Northern Shrike, 2 (count week)	White-winged Crossbill, 5
Gray Jay, 2	Common Redpoll, 713
Blue Jay, 82	Hoary Redpoll, 12
Black-billed Magpie, 177	Pine Siskin, 1
Common Raven, 78	House Sparrow, 144
Black-capped Chickadee, 539	

Doug Macaulay



Prairie Falcon, Photo by Don Delaney

Christmas Bird Count

Elk Island, December 26, 2012

Quite a few ENC members took part in the Elk Island CBC. Gerald Romanchuk led 14 people across Astotin Lake to Long Island, and Gerry and James Fox organized a driving route on the east side of the park. Gwynne Hayward compiled the following list from their accounts and those of other participants:

- | | |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| Northern Goshawk, 1 | Common Raven, 20 |
| Ruffed Grouse, 6 | Black-capped Chickadee, 88 |
| Rock Pigeon, 5 | Boreal Chickadee, 6 |
| Short-eared Owl, 1 | White-breasted Nuthatch, 2 |
| Great Horned Owl, 1 | Red-breasted Nuthatch, 2 |
| Downy Woodpecker, 12 | Brown Creeper, 2 |
| Hairy Woodpecker, 10 | European Starling, 16 |
| Blue Jay, 11 | Snow Bunting, 301 |
| Black-billed Magpie, 52 | Evening Grosbeak, 5 |
| American Crow, 4 | Common Redpoll, 326 |

Gwynne Hayward



Strathcona County, December 29, 2012

After a week of -25°C temperatures and overcast days there was a break in the weather to bring out the birds and bird watchers for the Strathcona Christmas Bird Count. A sunny -5°C day was enjoyed by 95 participants as they counted 7,553 birds, 20% more than recorded in either of the past two years, of 36 species.

Many species showed higher than average numbers this year, including Hairy Woodpecker (84), Downy Woodpecker (191, the highest in the last ten years), and Pileated Woodpecker (35, the highest recorded on a Strathcona Bird Count).

Two other species had record high numbers as well, the Common Raven and the Merlin. Raven sightings (161) have risen from a two-year low to a new record high, while the Merlin, our well established resident falcon, was sighted a record 5 times.

Numerous sightings were reported of Bohemian Waxwings invading the urban areas to feast on the fruit of Mountain Ash trees. While their numbers can fluctuate wildly, this year's total (1,698) is the highest since 2005 when 7,654 were recorded.

A few uncommon birds were reported. A flock of Cedar Waxwings (95), common here in the summer but usually migrating in the fall, was reported near South Cooking Lake. Also from the same area was a Gray Jay, usually found in the Boreal Forest, and another summer resident, a Song Sparrow, coming to a feeder.

Our feeder watchers reported good numbers of birds coming to their yards. Pine Grosbeaks (380), while not in big flocks, were turning up regularly. Pine Siskins (128) had the best numbers in years, while Common Redpoll (1,126), Black-capped Chickadee (1,890), and White-breasted Nuthatch (155) were all above the average numbers recorded. Of note, House Sparrow, also seen at the feeders, had the lowest numbers recorded here (202), down from the past annual average of 500.

- | | |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Canada Geese, 1 | White-breasted Nuthatch, 155 |
| Northern Goshawk, 1 | Red-breasted Nuthatch, 24 |
| Merlin, 5 | American Robin, 1 |
| Ruffed Grouse, 18 | Starling, 8 |
| Rock Dove, 401 | Bohemian Waxwing, 1,698 |
| Great Horned Owl, 3 | Cedar Waxwing, 95 |
| Northern Saw-whet Owl, 1 | Song Sparrow, 1 |
| Snowy Owl, 2 | Dark-eyed Junco, 30 |
| Northern Flicker, 7 | Snow Bunting, 134 |
| Downy Woodpecker, 191 | Northern Cardinal, 4 |
| Hairy Woodpecker, 84 | House Finch, 68 |
| Pileated Woodpecker, 35 | Pine Grosbeak, 380 |
| Northern Shrike, 1 | Pine Siskin, 128 |
| Blue Jay, 182 | Common Redpoll, 1,126 |
| Gray Jay, 1 | Hoary Redpoll, 16 |
| Magpie, 473 | Evening Grosbeak, 14 |
| American Crow, 7 | House Sparrow, 202 |
| Common Raven, 161 | |
| Black-capped Chickadee, 1,890 | |

Dianne and Jim Goodwin



Pine Grosbeak, Photo by Bob Schwartz
Song Sparrow, Photo by Gerald Romanchuk
 Strathcona County CBC

Christmas Bird Count

St. Albert, December 29, 2012

After the cold weather over Christmas, bush beaters were pleased to see temperatures warm ahead of the count on December 29. Conditions were quite favourable: temperatures starting at -5°C reached -2°C by mid-afternoon, although the sunny morning gave way to a cloudy afternoon. Winds were westerly all day and moderate, although inducing some wind chill. The total number of participants was 161, with 42 venturing out in the field and the other 119 reporting the birds at their feeders. Thanks, as always, to the six zone captains: Bob Lane, Dan Stoker, Peter Demulder, Carol Gosche, Dennis Miller, and Alan Hingston.

Mallard, 4	Red-breasted Nuthatch, 81
Northern Goshawk, 3	White-breasted Nuthatch, 62
Merlin, 2	Brown Creeper, 2
Gray Partridge, 11	American Robin, 7
Ruffed Grouse, 2	Bohemian Waxwing, 2,025
Rock Pigeon, 693	Cedar Waxwing, 5
Great Horned Owl, 1	Northern Shrike, 2
Snowy Owl, 5	European Starling, 3
Northern Saw-whet Owl, 1	White-throated Sparrow, 1
Downy Woodpecker, 99	Dark-eyed Junco, 48
Hairy Woodpecker, 19	Snow Bunting, 65
Northern Flicker, 16	Pine Grosbeak, 129
Pileated Woodpecker, 11	House Finch, 164
Blue Jay, 151	White-winged Crossbill, 3
Black-billed Magpie, 577	Common Redpoll, 735
Common Raven, 237	Hoary Redpoll, 6
Black-capped Chickadee, 968	Pine Siskin, 4
Boreal Chickadee, 25	House Sparrow, 603

Count week birds, in addition: Sharp-shinned Hawk, American Crow, Townsend's Solitaire and American Goldfinch.

A total of 6,770 birds of 36 species were reported.

Alan Hingston



Northern Goshawk, Photo by Gerald Romanchuk

Opal, January 1, 2013

This was the ninth annual Opal CBC. I should point out to those who wonder why they didn't hear about it, that since I inherited the compiler job about 6 years ago, this count has never been advertised and no one has been invited. In the past, people who showed interest were added in, the zones have been divided up, and now we're at a point where it becomes a bit of a pain to organize more people – especially since the compiler is extremely lazy! And doesn't like extra paperwork! So apologies to anyone who wanted to come out. We'll be running more Edmonton Nature Club field trips out there, and it'll be much easier to do some general birding in that situation.

We had nice, mild temperatures, but the strong wind made birding very challenging. I thought the chickadee numbers made for a good example of how strong winds can affect detectability of some species. In the previous 5 years the average number of Black-capped Chickadees has been about 330. This year's 138 (with a few feeder watch results still to come in) is less than half. With other common birds such as Downy Woodpecker, the story is similar.

I wouldn't have been surprised if we didn't see any Great Grays – they often seem to lay low on windy days. But we did get 3. There haven't been many Hawk Owl reports from up there, and I thought we might get shut out. Luckily, Ted and Del found one for us.

Here are the preliminary results:

Northern Goshawk, 2	Gray Jay, 2
Accipiter sp., 2	Black-billed Magpie, 126
Ruffed Grouse, 10	Common Raven, 75
Rock Pigeon, 185	Black-capped Chickadee, 138
Short-eared Owl, 1 (count week)	Boreal Chickadee, 2
Northern Hawk Owl, 1	Red-breasted Nuthatch, 3
Snowy Owl, 2	White-breasted Nuthatch, 5
Great Gray Owl, 3	European Starling, 10
Downy Woodpecker, 7	Snow Bunting, 365
Hairy Woodpecker, 2	Red Crossbill, 5
Black-backed Woodpecker, 2	Evening Grosbeak, 2
Pileated Woodpecker, 2	Common Redpoll, 521
Northern Shrike, 2	Hoary Redpoll, 8
Blue Jay, 17	Pine Grosbeak, 230
	House Sparrow, 69

Gerald Romanchuk



Northern Hawk Owl, Photo by Janice Hurlburt

Field Trip Reports

Goldbar Park, December 8, 2012

Twelve of us suited up and booted up for a cool walk along the river and up through the ski trails around Goldbar Park from 10 a.m. to noon.

No dramatic finds! Small variety of waterfowl and passerines. We were able to pick out both Hoary and Common Redpolls, Robins, and a Northern Flicker. The eagles were absent. The river is still open all the way across and for some distance downstream, so the concentration of waterfowl is limited.

We saw the following 15 species (also listed in eBird):

Mallard	Black-capped Chickadee
Common Goldeneye	White-breasted Nuthatch
Rock Dove	American Robin
Downy Woodpecker	Bohemian Waxwing
Northern Yellow-shafted Flicker	Common Redpoll
Pileated Woodpecker	Hoary Redpoll
Black-billed Magpie	Pine Grosbeak
Common Raven	

Brian Stephens



DC



Hoary Redpoll

Photo by Gerald Romanchuk

Fort Saskatchewan, December 1, 2012

Twenty-three of us from the Edmonton Nature Club set out for a cool, snowy, first day of the birding winter list season. We started in Sherwood Park and toured around southeast of Fort Saskatchewan, into the Fort for lunch, across the river around Manning Drive and Highway 37, then down to the river access near the Capital Region sewage plant.

We went to check out the farm on Highway 21 where up to a week ago there were hundreds of ducks feeding and several eagles watching them. Nothing there today, looks like the ducks have given up on that field. Otherwise we started well with a Snowy Owl on Township Road 540 east of Highway 21.

Things slowed down further out towards Josephberg, but we did see a Northern Shrike and several flocks of Redpolls, including a few Hoaries plus Snow Buntings at a couple of places.

After lunch we went north of the river and took a quick spin around Highways 28A and 37 and Manning Drive. We saw 4 more Snowies in that area and a flock of Gray Partridge.

Going back south of the river, we went west on Township Road 540 where it dead-ends at the river. At this point, ten of us decided to take a hike along the river to the sewage plant outflow. We were rewarded with a few good birds. In addition to the expected Mallards and Goldeneye, we saw a lone Tundra Swan, a Lesser Scaup, and a Bald Eagle; for an unexpected bonus, Martin Sharp found the birds of the day – two Long-tailed Ducks.

The group was separated on the way back to Sherwood Park. One car saw a Snowy on Highway 21 near the duck farm. My car saw one on Clover Bar Road and a last one perched on a semi-trailer/billboard on the Yellowhead near Sherwood Drive.

All in all, a nice start to the winter list! The 17 birds are listed below:

Tundra Swan	Northern Shrike
Mallard	Black-billed Magpie
Lesser Scaup	Common Raven
Long-tailed Duck	Black-capped Chickadee
Common Goldeneye	Bohemian Waxwing
Gray Partridge	Snow Bunting
Bald Eagle	Common Redpoll
Snowy Owl	Hoary Redpoll
Downy Woodpecker	

Gerald Romanchuk



DC

Field Trip Reports

The list of birds from the ENC Fort Saskatchewan trip led by Gerald Romanchuk will be the start of our Edmonton area winter bird count which runs from December 1, 2012, to February 28, 2013. The count area is an approximate 80 km diameter circle centred on Edmonton. West/east boundaries are roughly Seba Beach and Ryley and the north/south are roughly Westlock and Wetaskiwin.

Everyone is welcome to participate in the count by simply posting any birds observed that are not already on the list, giving us the date and location. Happy Winter Birding!

Gerry Fox

The Edmonton area winter bird count as of January 11, 2013, remains at 74 species as follows:

Western Grebe	Gyr Falcon	Pileated Woodpecker	White-throated Sparrow
Tundra Swan	Gray Partridge	Northern Shrike	Song Sparrow
Canada Goose	Ruffed Grouse	Blue Jay	Dark-eyed Junco
Mallard Duck	American Coot	Gray Jay	Snow Bunting
Gadwall	Eurasian Collared-Dove	Black-billed Magpie	Evening Grosbeak
Northern Pintail	Rock Pigeon	Common Raven	Pine Grosbeak
American Widgeon	Short-eared Owl	American Crow	Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch
Green-winged Teal	Great Horned Owl	Black-capped Chickadee	House Finch
Redhead	Snowy Owl	Boreal Chickadee	Red Crossbill
Lesser Scaup	Great Gray Owl	Red-breasted Nuthatch	White-winged Crossbill
Long-tailed Duck	Barred Owl	White-breasted Nuthatch	Common Redpoll
Common Goldeneye	Boreal Owl	Brown Creeper	Hoary Redpoll
Bufflehead	Northern Saw-whet Owl	Golden-crowned Kinglet	Pine Siskin
Common Merganser	Northern Hawk Owl	Townsend's Solitaire	American Goldfinch
Sharp-shinned Hawk	Belted Kingfisher	American Robin	House Sparrow
Cooper's Hawk	Downy Woodpecker	European Starling	
Northern Goshawk	Hairy Woodpecker	Bohemian Waxwing	
Bald Eagle	Black-backed Woodpecker	Cedar Waxwing	
Merlin	Northern Flicker	Northern Cardinal	
Prairie Falcon		American Tree Sparrow	

Gray Partridge



Photo by Gerald Romanchuk

Hawrelak Park, November 25, 2012

On this sunny and crisp Sunday morning 15 of us met at 9:00 in Hawrelak Park. The area near the feeders produced the usual scattering of chickadees, downies, and nuthatches along with a few Pine Grosbeaks calling overhead. Near the footbridge we found a pair of Goldeneyes and a few other species on our walk down the trail. As we were standing in the parking lot after our stroll a nice finale was the Gyr Falcon that passed overhead. We listed it as probable, as it flashed by so quickly. The list of 14 species follows:

Common Goldeneye	Red-breasted Nuthatch
Downy Woodpecker	White-breasted Nuthatch
Northern Flicker	Brown Creeper
Gyr Falcon (probable)	Bohemian Waxwing
Black-billed Magpie	Dark-eyed Junco
Common Raven	Pine Grosbeak
Black-capped Chickadee	Common Redpoll

Gerry Fox

Field Trip Reports

Whitemud Ravine, November 11, 2012

Nineteen hearty souls participated in our monthly walk in the Whitemud Ravine. It was a nice sunny day, although a little chilly.

The birds were few and far between. We saw the following 10 species:

Ring-billed Gull	American Crow
Rock Pigeon	Black-billed Magpie
Hairy Woodpecker	Common Raven
Downy Woodpecker	Black-capped Chickadee
Pileated Woodpecker	Golden-crowned Kinglet

James Fox

Black-capped Chickadee



Photo by Gerald Romanchuk

Hawrelak Park, November 25, 2012

On this sunny and crisp Sunday morning 15 of us met at 9:00 a.m. in Hawreluk Park. The area near the feeders produced the usual scattering of chickadees, downies, and nuthatches, along with a few Pine Grosbeaks calling overhead. Near the foot-bridge we found a pair of Goldeneyes and a few other species on our walk down the trail. As we were standing in the parking lot after our stroll, a nice finale was the Gyrfalcon which passed overhead. We listed it as probable, as it flashed by so quickly. The complete list of 14 species follows:

Common Goldeneye	Red-breasted Nuthatch
Downy Woodpecker	White-breasted Nuthatch
Northern Flicker	Brown Creeper
Gyrfalcon (probable)	Bohemian Waxwing
Black-billed Magpie	Dark-eyed Junco
Common Raven	Common Redpoll
Black-capped Chickadee	Pine Grosbeak

Gerry Fox

Wabamun Area, October 27, 2012

Nineteen of us braved the elements to bird the Wabamun area west of Edmonton today. We started at the provincial park, worked our way down the east side of the lake to the Keephills Cooling Pond, and then finished off at Genesee Lake and the Genesee Natural Area. Most of the sloughs and smaller, shallower water bodies are now frozen over and even Wabamun Lake itself had a good ice fringe, with the bay at the provincial park being mostly frozen over.

Regardless, we found a total of 43 species, including some good ones highlighted in bold type:

Pacific Loon (Keephills)	Bald Eagle
Pied-billed Grebe (east side of Lake Wabamun at Ironhead)	American Coot
Red-necked Grebe	Bonaparte's Gull
Horned Grebe	(very poor views of what may have been a late Franklin's Gull)
Western Grebe	Ring-billed Gull
Double-crested Cormorant	California Gull
Canada Goose	Herring Gull
Tundra Swan	Downy Woodpecker
Mallard	Blue Jay
Northern Pintail	Black-billed Magpie
Gadwall	Common Raven
American Wigeon	Black-capped Chickadee
Green-winged Teal	Boreal Chickadee
Lesser Scaup	White-breasted Nuthatch
Ring-necked Duck	Golden-crowned Kinglet
Redhead	Bohemian Waxwing
Common Goldeneye	European Starling
Bufflehead	Red-winged Blackbird
Ruddy Duck	Common Redpoll
Hooded Merganser	Hoary Redpoll
Common Merganser	Pine Siskin
Common Loon	
Rough-Legged Hawk (Genesee)	

Martin Sharp

Pacific Loon



Photo by Gerald Romanchuk

Field Trip Reports

Western Lakes Loop – October 21, 2012

The blisteringly blustery cold start for today's ENC trip was at the BLESS Shelter and BLESS platform at Big Lake, where we were met by noted local environmentalist Elke Blodgett. Wind was biting at -4 degrees that felt like -20, but the day started off well with a Snow Bunting heard and then found by Gerald perched at close distance in the grass. The group then had notable species near the platform that included Hooded Mergansers and two juvenile Bald Eagles. A several hundred strong group of gulls at the platform produced Ring-billed, California, and Herring. There was some icing on the Sturgeon River and various ponds this morning and with this week's weather forecast, freeze-up is likely quite imminent! Elke told us of spotting and photographing a momma moose and two calves between the platform and shelter earlier in the week.

Surprisingly, no swans at Big Lake today, but we had Tundras elsewhere more than once, with Trumpeters overflying us at Seba Beach at end of day. Most of the day we had trouble finding washrooms that weren't closed and locked up for the season, so we may have to run this trip a week earlier next year. Elke is encouraging us to write to the City of St. Albert to advocate getting some washrooms installed at Big Lake, and Jennifer likewise mentioned she will write Alberta Beach about the locked facilities there. At Sandy Lake a Bohemian Waxwing obligingly perched on a wire above us so we could get a good look at his undertail coverts, and thank goodness the burger place opened up early for us so we could have some hot coffee and a bathroom break. Overall, we had a very nice list of waterfowl on the day, with highlights for me that included Redhead, Canvasback, and Shoveler. Four grebe species was also pretty decent for this time of year.

I've long had this theory that getting lost and wrong turns often produces good birds. A random turn today produced a murmuration of 100 Starlings, and a juvenile Goshawk popped in the same binocular view while we were enroute from Lake Isle to Wabamun. Two loons at Seba Beach provided some final excitement, a juvenile Common Loon spotted by Kurt Brauner, and what we thought was a juvenile Pacific Loon spotted by Janice Hurlburt. After much back-channel consultation in the week after the field trip with several experts, there was strong consensus that we had a smaller individual juvenile Common Loon after all. American Robin was the last species for the list, seen on the way home west of Fallis.

Lakes and water bodies we visited included Big Lake, Murray Marsh, Riviere Qui Barre, Sturgeon River, Devil's Lake, Lac Ste. Anne, Lake Isle, and Wabamun. We returned to the start point at 7:15 p.m. after 11 hours of birding. To the 20 or so extremely hardy and keen birders who stuck through one windy location after another, thanks everyone, for your patience!

Our full list of 50 species is shown below:

Common Loon	American Wigeon
Horned Grebe	Northern Shoveler
Eared Grebe	Green-winged Teal
Red-necked Grebe	Lesser Scaup
Western Grebe	Canvasback
Tundra Swan	Redhead
Trumpeter Swan	Common Goldeneye
Canada Goose	Bufflehead
Cackling Goose	Common Merganser
Mallard	Ruddy Duck
Northern Pintail	Hooded Merganser
Gadwall	

Northern Harrier
 Northern Goshawk
 Rough-legged Hawk
 Bald Eagle
 Ruffed Grouse
 American Coot
 Killdeer
 Greater Yellowlegs
 Long-billed Dowitcher
 Bonaparte's Gull
 Ring-billed Gull
 California Gull
 Herring Gull

Rock Pigeon
 Downy Woodpecker
 Blue Jay
 Black-billed Magpie
 Common Raven
 Black-capped Chickadee
 Red-breasted Nuthatch
 White-breasted Nuthatch
 American Robin
 European Starling
 Bohemian Waxwing
 Snow Bunting
 House Sparrow

Steve Knight

Juvenile Common Loon



Photo by Gerald Romanchuk

Snow Bunting



Photo by Janice Hurlburt

Field Trip Reports

Whitemud Ravine (North and South), October 20, 2012

We met at Fox Drive and Whitemud Creek at 8:30 a.m., at which time it “dawned” on us that the sun had just come up. Nevertheless, 13 participants headed up the creek in light snow at about 1° C. Generally, the walk was quiet, with typical winter species. We went as far as the Aspen Gardens junction (about 6 km from the river).

On the way back we had three treats: a Great Horned Owl, a Bald Eagle, and a Northern Shrike. Looks like the ducks have finally left the creek (a few days ago, Mallards were still present). We also noticed a small flock of Common Redpolls flying over.

We saw the following 18 species:

- | | |
|---------------------|-------------------------|
| Canada Goose | Black-billed Magpie |
| Bald Eagle | Common Raven |
| Ring-billed Gull | Black-capped Chickadee |
| Great Horned Owl | Boreal Chickadee |
| Downy Woodpecker | White-breasted Nuthatch |
| Hairy Woodpecker | Brown Creeper |
| Pileated Woodpecker | American Robin |
| Northern Shrike | Dark-eyed Junco |
| Blue Jay | Common Redpoll |

Brian Stephens



Whitemud Ravine South



Common Redpoll

Photo by Gerald Romanchuk



Flying Squirrel



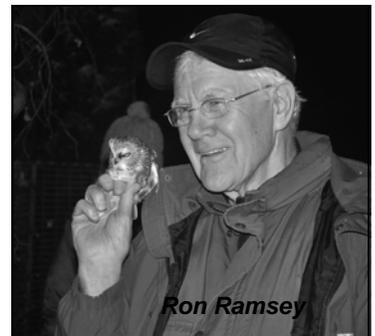
Hardy Pletz



Photos by Gerald Romanchuk



James Fox



Ron Ramsey

Photos by Colleen Raymond

Field Trip Reports

Coal Lake and Bigstone Creek Northern Saw-whet Owl Monitoring Field Trip, October 13, 2012

We set out Saturday afternoon with a convoy of 10 vehicles and 20+ birders. Managing to keep everyone mostly together, we headed down Highway 21 past New Sarepta and took some country roads down the west side of Bittern Lake. We lucked out with a beautiful day, mostly sunny and 18° C.

We saw various ducks and a few dowitchers on some of the small ponds, but were surprised by the lack of raptors. A few of us got on a soaring adult Bald Eagle, also saw a few Harriers and a Rough-legged Hawk.

At the Ritter Wetland, there was a nice mixture of waterfowl, with quite a few swans, including one with a numbered neck collar. Gerry Fox told us it likely came from Alaska; he's going to report the number. Quite a few Cackling Geese were among the Canadas and White-fronts. We also saw an interesting white goose. It looked small and round-headed like a Ross's, but the bill was a bit long and had a "grin" patch. We speculated that it was a Ross's X Snow hybrid.

We made a quick stop at Coal Lake. Things were pretty quiet and we were running a little late, so we continued on towards Millet.

We were very lucky that Hardy Pletz had invited us to his acreage on Bigstone Creek, where he runs a Northern Saw-whet Owl monitoring station. When we got there, Hardy and Janos Kovacs had a fire going. Hardy took us on a tour of his beautiful property, and we picked up a few more birds, including Mourning Dove, Boreal Chickadee, and Brown Creeper. After the tour we settled in for a wiener roast. It was a great social gathering and we all enjoyed the mostly reasonable company (just kidding! It was a great group) and the pleasant fall weather.

When it got dark and we were waiting for the first net check, people started noticing lighting flashes to the north. "Was that really lightning? In October?" When the thunder started rumbling, it removed all doubts! At that point we were wondering what we were in for. A few drops of rain fell, but it didn't seem too bad until it started hailing. The marble-sized hailstones really stung the back of the neck! Luckily, it blew over quickly and we didn't have to abort the banding. Hardy checks the nets every half hour. On about the third check, the folks who went down with him came up with big smiles and we had our first owl.

After that people started to drift off, heading for home. An hour or so later, Hardy came up with owl number two. We watched him weigh and measure the little owl. He used a black light to age the bird, whose hatch-year flight feathers glowed pink in the black light. If they all show up pink, as both did that night, he knows they're hatch-year owls.

A handful of us stayed out until Hardy took down the nets

around 11:30 p.m. We got a great look at a Flying Squirrel visiting one of the feeders. Very cool to watch it go off on a glide. It was close to midnight when we left and almost 1:00 a.m. when I got home, but well worth it for a fantastic day. Big Thanks to Hardy and Janos!

We saw 23 species at Bittern Lake and 15 species in Millet::

Bittern Lake	Northern Harrier
Tundra Swan	Rough-legged Hawk
Greater White-fronted Goose	American Coot
Snow Goose	Greater Yellowlegs
Ross's and Snow X Goose Hybrid?	Long-billed Dowitcher
Canada Goose	Ring-billed Gull
Cackling Goose	Rock Pigeon
Gadwall	Blue Jay
Northern Shoveler	Black-billed Magpie
Green-winged Teal	Common Raven
Redhead	Black-capped Chickadee
Bald Eagle	European Starling

Millet	White-breasted Nuthatch
Canada Goose	Brown Creeper
Mourning Dove	American Robin
Downy Woodpecker	Cedar Waxwing
Hairy Woodpecker	White-throated Sparrow
Black-billed Magpie	Dark-eyed Junco
Black-capped Chickadee	House Finch
Boreal Chickadee	Pine Siskin

Gerald Romanchuk

Northern Saw-whet Owl



Photo by Gerald Romanchuk

The Owl Who Wouldn't Fly...but did

We parked near the Big Lake Environmental Support Society (BLESS) shelter and were getting ready for a little walk along the Sturgeon River when we met a couple who told us they had just met someone with a “huge” lens on his camera who had photographed a Great Horned Owl. They had seen it as well. I knew immediately who that person was, one of my friends who is a keen observer of wildlife. Upon arriving at the BLESS viewing platform, I noticed a very large owl pellet on the floorboards of the approach. By large, I mean something 15 cm long and 3.5 cm in diameter composed of feathers with bone fragments visible here and there in the soggy black mass. I put it in a plastic baggie and took it home for further examination, curious to know what kind of prey remains it contained.

That evening I received an e-mail with photographs of a Great Horned Owl that confirmed my assumption about the identity of the photographer. The next day I went out as usual and along the trail I met my friend with the huge lens and the large, well behaved dog he always has with him. We chatted for a while and he told me the owl was still there, at exactly the same spot where he had photographed it the day before.

He gave me some directions to the whereabouts of the owl and we went our separate ways. I decided to see if I could find that owl myself. Chances are it would be gone by the time I got there, but nothing ventured, nothing gained. Continuing on the trail toward the “dark forest,” as I call it, I met another couple I know. “Are you looking for something, Ludo?” they asked.

“Uhhmmmmmm...yes I am,” I replied.

“The owl?”

“Yeah, why?”

“Well, it's still there. We've seen it.”

That last bit of information put more fuel on my fire and with heightened enthusiasm I continued. Hiking through the forest was pleasant. The early morning dampness made for quiet going. The scent of decaying leaves on the ground, that specific smell of the high-bush cranberries, the diffused light and colours of the autumn woods – everything was just perfect.

Having arrived in the general area where the owl was supposed to be, I slowly proceeded. I will describe the place. A big jumble of beaver-felled aspen lay helter skelter over a large area. For some years this had been a beaver pond, but somebody opened the dam, draining the pond, so no more beavers!

Scanning the area, I spotted the owl sitting less than a metre off the ground on a nearly horizontal log. What luck! I took some photos. The owl just sat there and looked at me through squinted eyes. Wow, this was unreal. I have photographed Great Horned Owls before, but always looking up. Not having the huge lens (I like that term), I slowly worked my way toward the bird. This opportunity had to be exploited, but why didn't the owl fly away? This is not typical owl behaviour, I thought, and wondered if something was wrong with it, an injured wing perhaps. Closer and closer I got – portrait time!

When I was about three metres away, the owl became a bit more alert, looking 180 degrees behind itself, then to the right, to the left, and up. It is going to fly, I thought. That is exactly what happened. With graceful wingbeats it disappeared into the dark forest, nothing wrong with it at all, and that made me happy.

We now return to the owl pellet.

After soaking the pellet in hot water, I teased it apart. It contained very dark feathers, no fur of any kind. The bones I found were from a fair-sized bird, judging by the size. Most were in bits and pieces, but some were still intact.

Comparing the skull (without bill) to skulls in my own collection, I thought it looked like an American Coot. I saved and dried some larger feathers. To be 100% sure of my identification, I took my treasure to the Royal Alberta Museum, where I am a research associate, and with my former colleague Gary Erickson (assistant curator of the ornithology department) compared the unbroken bones to those in the RAM collections. We concluded that, indeed, it had been an American Coot, a juvenile to be exact, since the bones were just a bit smaller than those in the museum.

This is the part where I am going to speculate. No proof whatsoever.

- A. Was the owl we photographed the one who ate the coot, and was it so full of food it did not want to move, or...
- B. Was this a favourite place for the owl to roost or wait for mice, voles, frogs, or salamanders? For 24 hours? Whatever the case, it is only 1.5 km between where the owl was photographed and the pellet was regurgitated.

You be the judge.

Ludo Bogaert

The Owl Who Wouldn't Fly...but did



Great Horned Owl and contents of pellet



Photos by Ludo Bogaert

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

Members' Photos



Boreal Owl - Photo by Michael Butler



Short-eared Owl - Photo by Steve Knight



Dark-eyed Junco - Photo by Janice Hurlburt



American Robin - Photo by Gerald Romanchuk



Weasel - Photo by Betty Fisher



Hoar Frost - Photo by Betty Fisher