

# THE PARKLAND NATURALIST



MAY-AUGUST 2015

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## Our Favourite Working Vacation

Ever since I was 13, my mom and I have travelled out to Vancouver Island to volunteer and spend time with the birds at The Raptors, a birds-of-prey centre located in Duncan. The very first year I attended a week-long falconry course and have been volunteering since then. Gill and Robyn Radcliffe (and really all of the staff) have treated us like family since the first day we arrived. This centre is like no other that I have visited, and the passion that these folks have for the birds is evident in everything they do.

I have picked our first day of this trip to detail out and give you an idea of a typical day at The Raptors.

We step out of our car and are greeted with the songs of more Swainson's Thrushes than we have ever heard in our lives! As we wander down the path we say hello to old friends and see what new friends have arrived. Boomer and Roo, the laughing Kookaburras, are still in their usual home. These two goofs have been here since our first visit and we can still make them laugh by telling a good Kookaburra joke (in their own language, of course). We are happy to see that most of the birds we know are still here and others that we don't see are working elsewhere. The centre does a show on Grouse Mountain and also provides pest control at a number of airports and landfills.

Once the humans notice we've arrived, the work begins! After all, volunteering is why we have come. Our first task today is to clean and fill the tub used for "eagle fishing" demonstrations. While down at the flying field we can hear a bit-tern doing its...call?...song? You know, its "glumpb, glumpb" thing. We are also keeping an eye on the big eagle pen, as they have introduced a rehab eagle that is getting ready to be released. The pen has a few non-releasable birds in it and we are monitoring how they are reacting to one another. It's easy to tell within the hour that the birds are respecting each other's space and all is going to go well.

Now we settle down and watch the first flying demonstration of our visit. If you have never visited The Raptors, you don't know what a treat this is. Today starts with Hera, a Bald Eagle, swooping in as she "fishes" a piece of food out of the pond we have just filled. She is graceful, accurate, and efficient. She can hit the prey each time. On our last visit she still had her juvenile plumage but now she sports a beautiful white head and tail.

Next they fly Spitfire, a Peregrine Falcon, hunting on the wing and making passes at breakneck speed over the stands, although it is the spectators' necks that might break, not his. Trying to follow these falcons as they change direction within feet above our heads can really make your head spin.

Spitfire clears the way for Anakin, "the most beautiful hawk in the world." Don't worry, he knows it; he even has his own

Facebook page. Anakin is a Harris's Hawk, one of the smartest raptors around. They are awesome at aerial acrobatics and not bad at running on the ground too.

The next two birds are even better on the ground. They are Turkey Vultures named Jury and Phoenix, resplendent with their bald red heads (they are actually bald). Despite that, I think they are quite beautiful. However, during this demo they ignore their trainers' tidbits to go after more lively prey. Their focus is on the "ferocious" buttercups that are growing on the flying field. Well, as the staff here always say, "It's a bird's world and anything can happen and probably will."

After the vultures were coaxed back to their enclosure, Spock, a Great Horned Owl, joins us. I think this picture says it all. Between the flying demonstrations, it's time to do "Meet and Greets," when we hold a bird so that the visitors can see it up close and ask questions. Harry, a Swainson's Hawk, is by far my mom's favourite. She always calls him Handsome Harry. I love them all; however, manning (holding) Kessie, (you guessed it) a kestrel, is special because she is such a dear. When you come up to her on her perch, she just hops up onto your glove with a look that seems to say, "What fun do we get to do now?" She is really so tiny and adorable. Once, I accidentally moved too quickly and she slid right off my hand because she is so light and doesn't have very strong talons.

Kessie, American Kestrel



To end the day, we all work to be sure the birds are safely back in their homes for the evening. Then we too can head home and rest up for the next day of our “vacation.”

### More memories of our trip

In the past we have made the trip out in August, but this year we were there in May so we had an extra special treat. There are baby Barn Owls so young they are just covered in down, but they have bald faces so they look like little white turkey vultures. Others thought they were ugly, but I love baby birds!

There were baby Red-tailed Hawks too. They look moody.

During one of the flying demos we flew two Barn Owls at the same time. They were absolutely adorable but a bit hard to manage. It was impossible to call just one and not the other,



Baby Barn Owls



Baby Red Tailed Hawk

so you pretty much ended up with two clamouring up your glove in search of the food.

Another flying demonstration stood out for me because of all the mishaps. First, Temuji, a young Bald Eagle, decided not to stick around the flying field and went off to visit the other eagles in their aviaries. The staff had to chase him up the hill and coax him down to a glove. After he was put away, a Ferruginous Hawk missed his

landing and crashed into the marsh. Staff had to go rescue



Barn Owl

him. He was a little muddy, but no worse for wear. Last of all came Wellie the Barred Owl, another young bird. He flew up a tree and took forever to come down. A photography club was visiting that day and all the big lenses on their cameras really intimidated him.

Gaston the Marabou Stork is a treat to see fly, because he is the biggest bird they have. When he stretches his neck he is about six feet tall with a really big wingspan. His bald head and weird neck pouch make him an interesting sight.

We had a great vacation! In addition to The Raptors, we made a trip out to Port Renfrew, saw killer whales on the ferry, visited the Reifel Bird Sanctuary and the Starratt Wildlife Sanctuary, and last but not least we got a picture of a goat, well really just his butt...the trip was complete.



**Jordan Lange**, Author

**Toby-Anne Reimer**, Editor and bottle washer



Jordan with a Barn Owl

## ENC Annual Banquet Report



The 2015 ENC Annual Banquet was held on March 28 at the Sawmill Banquet Centre. About 100 guests attended. Peter Sherrington was our speaker, and he gave a great presentation on the migration of Golden Eagles along the Rocky Mountains. Thank you, Peter, for sharing your experiences with us.

We presented two club awards. Marg Reine was the recipient of the Edgar T. Jones Conservation Award, and Bob Parsons received the Great Gray Owl Outstanding Service Award. Congratulations to both our award winners.

We had some great door prizes again this year, so a big thanks to The Wildbird General Store, Wild Birds Unlimited, STRIX Ecological Consulting, Gerald Romanchuk, and Jordan Lange for their generous donations. You really make my job easy.

Most everyone seemed to enjoy the meal and the new venue, so next year’s banquet has been booked at the same location. Mark your calendars for April 9, 2016 – see you there!

**Toby-Anne Reimer**, Banquet Coordinator

*Banquet photos by Gerald Romanchuk*



Peter Sherrington receives a photo donated by ENC Director Gerald Romanchuk



Toby-Anne Reimer presents a door prize to Nigel Stevens.

## President's Report, Spring–Summer 2015



**Our President, Ann Carter**

I'm very pleased to report that our club is thriving and our membership is at an all-time high. Whether you're a field tripper, audience member, board member, someone interested in conservation, or simply an avid reader of *The Parkland Naturalist*, this is your club, for members by members, and we appreciate your support.

Hundreds participated in our annual Snow Goose Chase. This event requires months of preparation by Bob Parsons and his hard-working crew. Kudos to Bob and the ninety volunteers who made it happen!

Several of our members collaborated with the City of Edmonton to provide the Master Naturalist program. This course takes place during the first three weeks in June each year. The program was created in 2009 as a way of engaging community members in stewardship within the local environment. Participants attend 35 hours of training and field trips provided by the city, then volunteer for 35 hours in activities that support natural area management, protection, and education. In some cases this includes volunteering with the ENC. Club members who've taken the course give it good reviews. For more information on the program, visit [http://www.edmonton.ca/programs\\_services/environmental/master-naturalist-course.aspx](http://www.edmonton.ca/programs_services/environmental/master-naturalist-course.aspx) <http://www.edmontonjournal.com/Edmonton+Master+Naturalist+Program+changes+lives/9903628/story.html>.

### ENC Endowment for Land Conservation and Stewardship Update

Members have been making donations both online and by mail. As of July 25 the balance in the fund was \$2,509. It's inspiring to note that Luke, one of our younger participants, (see photo on back page) chose to take donations rather than receive gifts for his birthday this year. With his dad's assistance, he forwarded the money to the ENC endowment fund to help conserve land in the Edmonton area. Details on the fund are available on our website Conservation page.

### Coming Attractions

Our indoor program speaker series and the study groups will soon be resuming presentations. Details are posted in the website calendar as they become available. Your topic suggestions are welcomed, and members are encouraged to participate as presenters to the various study groups. Field trips and nature walks continue year-round depending on the availability of leaders.

Mark your calendars: the Edmonton Christmas Bird Count (ECBC) is scheduled for December 20. This count has been held continuously for over 50 years as part of a world-wide citizen-science project. Information gathered contributes to an immense database managed and analyzed by Bird Studies Canada and the Audubon Society. We'll be looking for feeder watchers and bush beaters to count urban birds and help us hold our world record of the "count with the most participants"! Detailed information is available at [edmontonchristmasbirdcount.ca](http://edmontonchristmasbirdcount.ca).

**Thank you to the elected officials of the club for their dedication over the past year:** Secretary **Diane Barrett** for her prompt efficiency, Membership Secretary **John Jaworski** for his attention to detail, Treasurer **Stan Nordstrom** for his calm guidance on financial matters, Executive Director **Hendrik Kruger** for his considered opinions, Executive Director **James Fox** for his unique perspectives, Executive Director **Colleen Raymond** for her enthusiasm, and Executive Director **Gerald Romanchuk** for providing both new ideas and historical references. These folks guide the club and work to provide members with enrichment, events, and activities. It's my pleasure to be part of this team.

Members may contact the executive using the General Inquiries link on the ENC website home page, bottom right at [edmontonnatureclub.org](http://edmontonnatureclub.org).

**Respectfully submitted by Ann Carter, President,  
Edmonton Nature Club**

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**Membership**

**Download applications from the  
 ENC website or contact us at our  
 mailing address.**

**Membership Rates for 2015/16:**

**Household:     \$40.00/year**  
**Students:       \$20.00/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

## Snow Goose Chase, 2015

This year's annual Snow Goose Chase was held a week later than usual (May 2–3) due to a previous booking for the Tofield Community Hall, our morning centre of activities. There were three buses for the paying public plus nine sponsored buses for inner-city youth, low-income families, and immigrants new to our community. Participants included two groups of young naturalists from Nature Alberta and students from two Edmonton schools, Oliver and Stratford. We also had a very enthusiastic group of Sherwood Park Girl Guides and Brownies, their first participation in the Chase!

Early scouting reports in the first two weeks of April suggested that there was a big movement of Snow Geese northwards, so there was a concern that we might miss the huge numbers of geese annually seen in the Tofield/Ryley area. However, the week before the big weekend turned out pretty well; a smaller second wave was confirmed, so hopes were high for a successful event! I've always thought that we really need to see only one big flock of Snow Geese to make a day memorable, and that is exactly how the two days turned out.

Road conditions were quite good, the weather cooperated nicely, and some good bodies of water were close to the planned route. Wetlands play an important role in our local environment and all those taking part saw large numbers of waterfowl, including Pintails, Gadwalls, and Grebes. We also had good sightings of migrating shorebirds, including Baird's Sandpipers and Yellowlegs, which were actively scouring the mudflats for replenishment on their long way north.

Dr. Glynnis Hood was back this year at the Ministick Bird Sanctuary with her very popular beaver talk and display. The ever-smiling Ray Cromie was a huge attraction with his owl-banding demonstration, and my good friend Randal Hoscheit had scopes set up by the soccer field wetlands as we exited the downtown core. The Beaverhill Bird Observatory had a terrific bird-banding display in the Lions Park, and as usual the wetlands behind the Nature Centre were a popular stepping-off point for many on the buses. There was a very enthusiastic crew of volunteers, many returning from previous years. Scheduling can be a problem with so many buses, but the guides there did a wonderful job trying to keep to the various schedules!

Needless to say, the Community Hall was very busy, but everything ran very smoothly and there were no major congestions. Over 14 display tables were set up, and the well behaved participants thoroughly enjoyed the many presentations.

Over 90 volunteers again assisted in this, our 17<sup>th</sup> year, I believe. Club members, graduates from local colleges and

the University of Alberta, walk-ups – all helped in the planning and were very active over the two-day period. Donna Bamber helped me with many tasks, and I am most grateful for her ideas and enthusiasm. She tells me that she really misses my 3:00 a.m. emails!

### The Inner-City Buses

Close to fifteen different Edmonton-area groups packed into the nine buses that we ran this year. The tour guides, who all returned from last year, did an exceptional job, including the crew at the Mennonite Family Centre that had over 70 participants show up for the day's outing. Good job they had a van available for the overflow! We all missed Brenda Shaunessey, who was recuperating after a horse-riding accident, and hopes are high that we will see Brenda back with us next year.

Here are a few quotes from some of the many notes I received from the children this year.

*"I really enjoyed the man who showed us owl banding, can he come to my school next year."* Ahmed

*"The beaver talk was fun, they would enjoy the schools paddling pool."* Christine

*"The sandwiches were great but did not like the tomato...the lady gave me extra lettuce."* Joy

*"There should have been more balloons to give away. I will come back next year."* Henrietta.

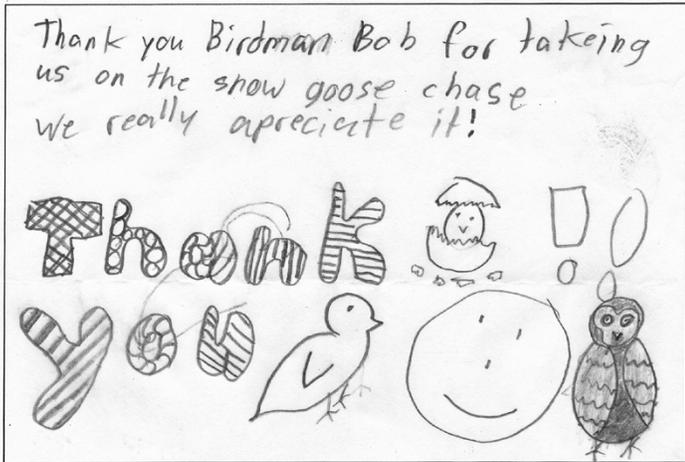
*"The snakes and scorpions were terrific but my teacher would have been scared!"* Cheyenne

*"Bob the Birdman is always around to make sure we have a good time."* Ema from Oliver School

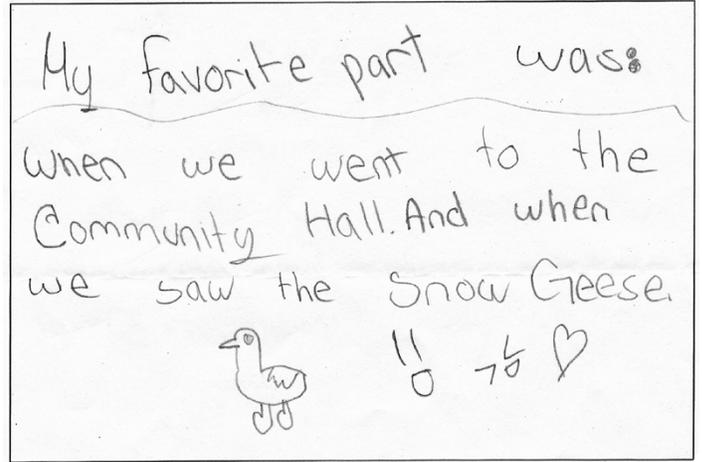
*"I finally saw a bluebird so now I am happy."* Rachel

### Bob Parsons





Notes and drawings to Bob Parsons from children on the Inner-City Buses.



(Without you we would have never had this trip) Thank You Birdman Bob!



## Brooks / Lake Newell May Species Count, May 16–17, 2015

This multi-club activity is traditionally held on the May long weekend, which this year was a week earlier than usual. Expectations were high for another successful count, with Tillebrook Provincial Park as our headquarters.

Six different clubs were represented, with a very high Edmonton attendance! I believe close to 32 participants attended, which is a little below our average but probably explained by a lower Calgary turnout than is generally the norm. TransCanada Pipelines was again our main sponsor and thanks go out to them for their valued financial support as well as their donation of some great door prizes, which were all well received. Ducks Unlimited Canada also provided some caps, which are always appreciated!

The weather generally cooperated and road conditions were excellent. There is still a fair amount of oil and gas development in the area, so access to some isolated sites was available. Scouting reports mentioned reservoirs were well filled, but some ponds and sloughs had great-looking mudflats that would attract the migrating shorebirds moving northwards on their annual flight to their breeding territories. One particular small lake close to Cassils was quite shallow; 300 Stilt Sandpipers flew in while Ken Orich from Lethbridge was checking out the action as he moved from one zone to another! A few of the usual watering holes were dried out, but overall conditions at most water bodies were excellent and some great numbers of various waterfowl were counted. Looking at my draft final count results it would appear that 168 species were observed, which is close to the average of the past sixteen years.

Thanks must also go the Brooks Royal Canadian Legion, which hosted our evening get-togethers. Manager Terry and his staff always make us feel most welcome, and we are all very happy to enjoy their facility.

Highlights of this year's count included 2 Burrowing Owls, 6 Harris's Sparrows, a sole Black-capped Chickadee, 1 Mourning Warbler, 1 White-winged Scooter, 16 Ferruginous Hawks, over 500 Whimbrel, and 1 Bald Eagle (first one in many years). The lonesome Snow Goose again showed up in the Medicine Wheel DU project – three years in a row at the same location! I cannot explain that occurrence, that is for sure. Special mention should also be made here of the 55 Black-crowned Night Herons all nesting in a row in the reed beds at San Francisco Lake!

Bird species missing this year include Peregrine Falcon, Violet-green Swallow, Short-eared Owl, American Redstart, Bobolink, and Broad-winged Hawk.

Low numbers include Lark Bunting (2), McCown's Longspur (2), American Bittern, Black-bellied Plover (probably on their way), and fewer Pelicans (364). House Finches can be quite irruptive, as we all know, and we counted only 2 this year, outnumbered by 3 Blue Jays in the Brooks town-site.

So, all-in-all, another great count! Final results can be found on the websites of Nature Calgary and the Edmonton Nature Club. As coordinator, I hope to see some of you out there next year – this is an event not to be missed.

**Bob Parsons**

Burrowing Owls



*Photo by Gerald Romanchuk*

## Writing-on-Stone / Milk River May Species Count, May 23–24, 2015

We had a very good turnout of 16 participants this year and a final species count of around 140, which is one of our highest numbers ever recorded. This count was held a week earlier than usual, as it generally follows the Brooks count held on the May long weekend. Road conditions were good, with very little rain during the weekend and great access to the rather remote Pinhorn Grazing Reserve. The views of the Sweetgrass Mountains in Montana were exceptional; most of the snow had already melted. Most of us camped at Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park, our traditional headquarters for this count. The 6 a.m. park walk is always of interest and this year was no exception...Rock Wren, Yellow-breasted Chat (count week Monday), Prairie Falcon, over 6 Towhees, Gray-cheeked Thrush, Harris's Sparrow (2), Bullock's Oriole, and a lone Rose-breasted Grosbeak. We are talking real remoteness here and not a great deal of cover! Pakowki Lake is always the centre of attention and most participants were able to visit, all remarking on the very high water level. I enjoy the drive there on the Sunday, my main intention being to find a Song Sparrow as well as trying to beat my record count of 740 Eared Grebes!

Highlights/surprises this year include a Sandhill Crane, a

Burrowing Owl at Etzikom, 4 Caspian Terns, close to 100 White-faced Ibis, 154 Sanderlings, and one lone Black-capped Chickadee. Low numbers include Bobolink, Semi-palmated Sandpiper, Common and Forster's Terns, and only 14 Lark Buntings (probably too early). Missing species included Solitary Sandpiper, Mountain Bluebird, Lincoln's Sparrow, Clark's Grebe (again), and Grasshopper Sparrow.

I always look forward to the count and the amazing enthusiasm shown by those taking part. Ken Orick from Lethbridge covers a vast amount of territory and we could not do this count without his expertise. I had a lot of fun with Donna and Arthur Wieckowski from Calgary, who willingly show up every year expecting something good from my extensive wine cellar! Arthur is Mr. Entertainment, in my opinion, and I value his humour and friendship very much although I'm not quite sure about his fascination with the Shoveler!

Count results can be seen on the Edmonton Nature Club website.

**Bob Parsons**

Brown Thrasher



Caspian Terns



*Photos by Arthur Wieckowski*

## Parkland Plant Notes – Weeds, Part 5

*“I am in blood stepp’d in so far, that should I wade no more, Returning were as tedious as go o’er.”*

I often think of these lines from *Macbeth* when contemplating what humanity has done to the earth. Our actions have often been irreversible, especially where they have caused the extinction of species; we can only go forward, hoping that we and our earth-mates do not ultimately meet the same fate as Macbeth. (A current example: crown-of-thorns starfish off the east coast of Australia are in epidemic numbers, thought to be fuelled in part by nutrient run-off from coastal farms. Efforts to control these coral-eaters includes injecting them *individually* with a toxin!)

Given humans’ overwhelming presence and far-reaching perambulations throughout the world, it is not surprising that stable ecosystems have been profoundly disturbed, and organisms displaced, sometimes into situations in new territory or under new circumstances where they can further perturb ecosystems. It is no surprise that biodiversity is being lost. When humans are forced or wish to intervene to undo the damage, it is also no surprise that university library shelves are now lined with books on invasion biology, conservation biology and restoration biology.

Let’s look at a few case-histories to understand how complicated things can get when we seek restitution in ecosystem situations.

### Hybrid cordgrasses outsmart the natives in the latter’s homelands

A hybrid between a saltmarsh grass, smooth cordgrass (*Spartina alterniflora*), from the east coast of the U.S., and the native California cordgrass (*Spartina foliosa*), is invading San Francisco Bay. Smooth cordgrass hybrids are notorious for their aggressive colonizing ability, and efforts are under way to remove this newcomer. However, during the course of removal it was observed that the endangered California clapper rail, which uses the hybrid for nesting sites, had declined in numbers. The rail also nests in the native cordgrass, but this, ousted by the hybrid, cannot recover fast enough to meet the rail’s needs. A decision was made to slow the pace of removal of the hybrid to allow the native cordgrass to catch up. However, since the hybrid is more “fit” than either of its parents, it is not clear whether California cordgrass will ever regain its former status, at least in the Bay.

Another story involving cordgrasses illustrates the importance of using science to inform control efforts, as well as the need to keep an open mind with respect to management. In the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century native small cordgrass (*Spartina maritima*) crossed with *S. alterniflora* brought from eastern America to produce a hybrid which, when its chromosome



*Mid Spartina anglica*

number subsequently doubled, became a vigorous invader of British and French coastlines under the name common cordgrass (*S. anglica*). In the 1980s *S. anglica* had invaded the west shore of the estuary of the River Kent in south Cumbria, U.K. Local council members of the community of Grange-over-Sands were concerned; they foresaw loss of tourism dollars as their sandy beaches disappeared. (I took a particular interest in the controversy as my father was living in Grange at the time.) A group of university students found that manual pulling of *S. anglica* had little effect. Then some geographer/historians pointed out that the cordgrass had built up because the river had changed its channel to the east side of the estuary. The river’s course is cyclical, and they suggested that everyone should just wait until the river resumed its western channel and all would be well!



*Impatiens glandulifera*

### Himalayan Balsam: A classic case of a plant that’s taken advantage of Man

The case of Himalayan balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*) is interesting, and has local relevance. This tall annual plant, with beautiful large pink flowers horizontally balanced on

flimsy flower stalks, has considerable aesthetic appeal. Its Latin name means “do not suffer” as in “do not suffer to touch me” and refers to its seed pods which burst explo-

sively when ripe, scattering the seeds far and wide, at the slightest vibration. It has become widely established along European rivers, and also crops up in Canadian provinces, including a few wet spots in Alberta. As an annual with minor infestations in this province it should be easy enough to get rid of here. But is it necessary? English nature writer Richard Mabey notes that in Britain it seems to occur particularly where river edges have been dredged, and does not invade intact riparian communities. Europeans now think it is better not to pull it where it grows along rivers, as this can



Native Orange jewelweed (*Impatiens capensis*) growing at Lake Wabamun

lead to more seed scattering and transport by water, but instead to concentrate on reducing the nutrient load of the river, which gives the advantage to native species. Himalayan balsam (also known as purple jewelweed) is a great producer of nectar, and some people have suggested eating its flowers as a method of control! In Edmonton, an extensive stand has established in Kennedale Ravine. The City is legally required to remove it as it is listed as a prohibited noxious weed under the Alberta Weed Control Act of 2010. Ecologically too, this makes sense. The Kennedale Ravine has connections to the North Saskatchewan River and we need to invoke the precautionary principle. The resulting bare ground could probably be relatively easily re-populated with two native jewelweeds, orange jewelweed (*Impatiens capensis*), and western jewelweed (*I. noli-tangere*).

### Invasives and conservation in southeastern United States

Travelling broadens one's mind with the extent, variety and problematic nature of invasive species. In Alabama in April I was fortunate to be taken on a guided tour of a bald-cypress (*Taxodium distichum*) swamp adjacent to the Alabama River in downtown Montgomery. Apart from a few iconic trees the vegetation was unfamiliar to me, an exception being Chinese privet (*Ligustrum sinense*), an abundant shrub at the site, as well as in people's gardens and waste places everywhere. (I recognized it and the characteristic sweet smell of its flowers because European privet was the main suburban hedgerow plant in the UK in the 1950s and 1960s when I was growing up.) Management of the swamp was still being debated, but I tended to agree that removal of

the pervasive privet would have done major collateral damage to the native inhabitants of the site. I should, however, have been inclined to exert some control over the dreaded kudzu vine (*Pueraria lobata*) that sprawled over vegetation lining the adjacent right-of-way. Another example of conservation, but lacking a significant weed problem through timely management, was Splinter Hill Bog in southern Alabama. A wetland managed by The Nature Conservancy, it presents a breath-taking vista of knee-high white top pitcher plants (*Sarracenia leucophylla*), together with sundews, sedges, rushes and ferns spread out under the widely-spaced trunks of longleaf pines (*Pinus palustris*). Longleaf pine ecosystems, once extending widely over the southeastern coastal plain, are now reduced to a quarter of their extent as a result of human land use changes and activities. They must be maintained by burning, and over much of this site they were in various phases of recovery from fire. An expensive management proposition, no doubt, but what better way to spend money?

### Loss of biodiversity through aggressive hybrids, the result of human introductions

Control of invasive species is often motivated by economic concerns, but what happens when loss of biodiversity as a result of alien invasion bears no such consequences, or when it seems a more natural and inevitable consequence of changing circumstances? In investigating whether Hudson Bay eyebright (*Euphrasia hudsoniana*) exists in Alberta, I came across a story online. Apparently the Department of



Common eyebright (*Euphrasia nemorosa*) growing along a trail in Elk Island National Park. Not a common species in Alberta, this population was found by a local botanist, the late Graham Griffiths.

Natural Resources in Minnesota is concerned about the fate of this species, a glacial relict that occurs in its jurisdiction along the rocky shores of Lake Superior (as well as in various places in Canada). It is threatened by European eye-bright (*E. stricta*), an introduction that is spread in part by human agency along trails and helps itself by having a much greater ecological adaptability. Local biologists fear especially that it will hybridize with native Hudson Bay eye-bright and the latter's unique North American genotype will be lost. *Euphrasia* is a genus of many species that are often difficult to distinguish from one another. Does anyone care if one's genotype is swamped? Apart perhaps from setting up carefully guarded reserves, management here seems even less feasible than with the coastal hybrid cordgrasses, a similar case of loss through hybridization. Well, biologists worry, and I can only say I am glad that someone knows and cares! I have not explored the scientific and moral dimensions of invasion control, conservation and restoration in these articles except to say that there is a scientific rationale for maintaining biodiversity; there are undoubtedly moral and emotional and aesthetic ones too.

### Conclusions

In my wanderings through the field of weeds I have come to the following conclusions:

1. Weeds of waste ground and gardens (ruderal) should be appreciated as great models for interpretation and the study of botany. They are superbly adapted to the disturbed ground habitats created by Man.
2. Weeds are healers of disturbed ground; they kickstart the process of succession to longer-lived, more competitive species. Unfortunately, these are not necessarily native species, which need to be artificially implanted if their propagules are not naturally available.
3. Invasive weeds, indeed invasive species of all kinds, those that have huge impacts on ecosystems and/or economic activities, have become the focus of attention.
4. Management of invasive weeds should be based on science as far as possible, to avoid futile or unsuccessful efforts.
5. "Novel" or hybrid ecosystems (a mix of non-native and native species produced by the influence of Man) must be tolerated in many cases where they are irreversible; however, where conditions warrant, weed management and restoration should be undertaken on a site-specific basis, again with the aid of science.
6. The purpose of restoration is not necessarily to achieve original ecosystems, but to avoid loss of biodiversity and/or create complex rather than simple ecosystems.
7. Where restoration to maintain or recreate biodiverse ecosystems is likely to be successful, it justifies the spending of significant amounts of money. (Such systems are priceless!)
8. The difficulty, sometimes futility, of effecting restoration provides plenty of grist for the critics' mill. Hence, **conservation should be the first priority where possible.** However, since both conservation and restoration involve land

use conflicts and changing of familiar landscapes, they will meet with resistance.

9. Human activity and locomotion around the world is not going to stop, and neither are weeds and ecosystem disturbance. There are going to be lots of jobs in invasion biology, restoration biology and conservation biology into the foreseeable future!

10. We need more scientists, naturalists and citizens who know and care about these things!

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- Lapointe, Nick. August 6, 2015. Can battling invasive species be a mistake? (Parts One and Two). Land Lines. The Nature Conservancy of Canada blog. <http://www.natureconservancy.ca/en/blog/battling-invasive-species-can.html#.VcUydV7bLX4>
- <http://www.natureconservancy.ca/en/blog/battling-invasive-species-can-2.html#.VcU0D17bLX4>

### Patsy Cotterill



White top pitcher plants (*Sarracenia leucophylla*) growing in a wetland under longleaf pine in Splinter Hill Bog, Alabama.

## Chasing First-Evers

This has been a banner year for rare birds in Alberta. Three first-ers for the province have been recorded. Considering that the provincial list is already over 400 species, and most years we're lucky to add one or maybe two species, it's been a truly remarkable year.

All three of these first-ers have an interesting story that showcases the luck, timing, and serendipity involved in finding a rare species – for both the original finders and any crazy bird-chasing twitchers looking for them.

Several birders went out and it seemed like everyone saw the bird without a whole lot of trouble. Everyone was happy. Except for me! I couldn't convince my friend Steve Knight to go looking for the grackle. He was all obsessed with going to Saskatchewan to look for Cowbirds and other silly things just to pad his Saskatchewan list. It took almost 2 weeks, but I finally talked him into it. What finally persuaded him was when I said, "James Fox got it and you're going to fall further and further behind on the Alberta list."



Great-tailed Grackle

The first first (is that proper English?) was a Great-tailed Grackle found near Hillspring in southwestern Alberta. This guy is a large blackbird that's been expanding its range from the Mexican border area over the last century. It's still relatively rare as far north as the Canadian border, but the way it's been expanding its range, it was almost to be expected in Alberta sooner or later.

To find out about this bird, we had to go through Newfoundland. Todd Boland, a birder from Newfoundland, was visiting his brother's property at Hillspring. When Todd got back to the Rock, he emailed a friend about the grackle. Turns out the friend knows me. "You're gonna want to know about this," he emailed. So, I confirmed that Todd's brother was okay with birders going down to look for the grackle and put the word out on the Albert-abird listserv.

So Steve and I headed south in early June. We got to Hillspring late on a Friday night, but had a couple of hours of light to look for the bird. No luck! But we did meet Greg Wagner from High River who was having a similar lack of success. We set up camp near Waterton and got up early the next morning to try again. Still couldn't find the stupid grackle. After going to Waterton for breakfast and birding in the park for a while, we went back in the afternoon.

Saw Greg again and we all set out searching one more time. Steve and I were looking a little ways down the road when we got the call from Greg, "Just saw the bird!" Steve said he'd never seen me drive so fast when I spun tires and pinned it back to the Boland driveway. Greg was walking up the driveway, pointing in the direction he'd seen it fly. The drive was heavily treed and I pushed

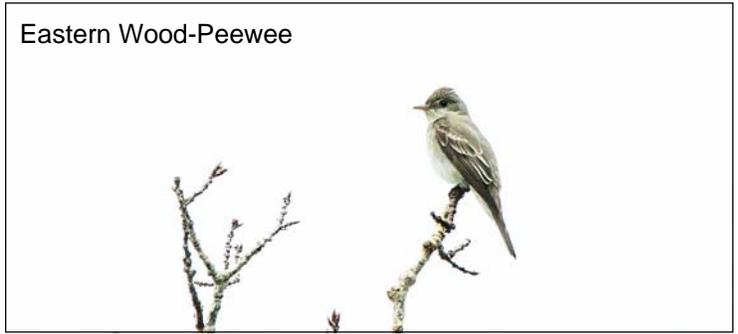
through to check an open area. There it was! After looking at dozens of Common Grackles and wondering if the tail was big enough, there was no doubt about this monster!

It was very cool to watch this sucker follow and try to court a female Brewer's Blackbird. He'd strut and posture and give all kinds of crazy calls, but she didn't want anything to do with him.

The second first (how does that sound?) was an Eastern Wood-Pewee. Tim Allison from Calgary was fishing near Cremona and heard the bird singing. Since Tim is originally from Ontario, he was very familiar with the bird's distinctive song – very different from our usual Western Wood-Pewee. A few Calgarians followed up on Tim's report and heard, saw, and recorded the bird. The species has been reported a few times before in our province, but no one had been able to get photos or recordings to fully document it.

This one was a little easier to talk Steve into chasing. First of all, James had already picked up the bird. Second, we did have a trip to the southeast planned. We were going to bird down around Wildhorse, and I had

Eastern Wood-Pewee



conceded to make a loop into southwest Saskatchewan. So...a little detour through Cremona seemed worthwhile.

It was almost noon by the time we got down there, which didn't seem promising to hear a bird that reportedly wasn't singing all that often. As we got closer a huge thunderstorm was rolling through the country. That actually improved my spirits. A lot of times, after a storm like that clears off, birds will get pretty active.

When we got to the general area where the bird was being seen, we pulled over and were "discussing" (some might call it arguing!) the directions we were given for the bird. Then we got a huge stroke of luck. A local came over to see what the heck we were doing. Guess we looked and sounded con-



Crested Caracara

vincing because he gave us the combination to the lock on the gate for an oil well road. As we pulled up to the well, I could hear the bird singing. It didn't even take long to get Steve on the bird! What was way harder was going through Saskatchewan with him the next day – looking for Cowbirds and the like.

The third first (by now I'm sure you're getting a grip on my use of the English language) was the most bizarre. How does a non-migratory species, the national bird of Mexico, turn up in Jasper? A Crested Caracara in northern Alberta? This one seemed like a true once-in-a-lifetime bird.



Crested Caracara

A little like the information about the grackle, the report on the Caracara had to travel around a bit before it got back to Alberta. Apparently a local tour guide in Jasper first saw it. He wasn't sure exactly what it was or where to report it. But the next day a visiting American photographer saw and shot the bird. She was familiar with the species, having seen one a few weeks earlier in Florida. I'm not sure about the next connection, but her report got to a biologist/birder in Manitoba who posted on the bird to Albertabird and Facebook.

Just as with the other firsts, it didn't take long for most of the keeners to get out and see the bird. You probably already guessed that Gerry and James Fox were near the front of the line. When I called Steve, this one took almost no convincing. It was Wednesday when the report came out and Thursday when the Foxes saw the thing, but neither of us could get away til Friday evening.

I was concerned that the bird wouldn't stick around very long. The story was that it was scavenging on an elk

that'd been hit by the train, but how long would the carcass last? It was encouraging to hear from Ann Carter on Friday afternoon that the bird was still there. So, we got through Edson and came around a curve in the road to find all the traffic at a standstill! Heard from a trucker that two tankers had collided; the highway was closed, and probably would be for several hours. Luckily, we heard some people talking about a bush road route to Hinton. We got to Jasper about 45 minutes behind schedule and met some birders at the Caracara spot who had seen the bird 15 minutes ago – always love to hear that! We waited til almost dark with no sign of the bird and gave up and went to town.

Early the next morning we went back to the spot. Drove up and down the highway with no luck. Turned up the Snaring River Road, and still nothing. Just as we were getting back to the highway, we saw a suspicious shape perched on a pine tree. Crested Caracara! Yes!!!

Seeing three lifers in one year, all first-ers for Alberta, sure wasn't expected. There are all kinds of theories why these birds are expanding their ranges or showing up in unusual places – climate change is brought up fairly often. But I can't help wondering if at least part of it is that there are just more people out looking. Many of them are equipped with digital cameras for solid evidence of what they saw. And then communication on social media makes it so much easier to spread the word. Whatever the reason, it was a lot of fun to chase those birds down. Now just hoping we can find our own rarity this fall!

**Gerald Romanchuk**

## Black Coyotes or Coydogs?

*Are black coyotes just a melanistic variant, or are they coydogs, a hybrid of coyotes and domestic dogs?*

In the winter 2013 issue of *Nature Alberta*, Jim Brohman detailed a first-hand encounter with a black coyote in Elk Island Park. The article made me think of my own observations of black coyotes in central Alberta. I knew *where* I had come across them – at Beaverhills Lake – but the event was way back in time, and finding the exact date would mean checking hundreds of hand-written pages in my field diaries.

Then, in the spring 2014 issue of *Nature Alberta*, editor Dennis Baresco wrote of Christopher Lee's suggestion that black coyotes are most likely coydogs. I agree with him and decided to make the effort of digging up my own sightings. To my relief, just short of giving up, I eventually found the first entry, dated May 1, 1995.

The location was the central west side of the lake, about half a km from the shore. Here, the cow pasture behind an inland farm was studded with willows, and as I approached on foot along the fence line, I spotted a group of eight canids emerging from the bushes. As soon as they became aware of me, standing in the open, they retreated back into cover. Watching through binoculars I had just enough time to note that the animals appeared to be coyotes, but several were jet black, others dark brown or tan-grey. The most unusual pack member, which kept to the rear of the group, was piebald – white and black. In fact, it looked like a border collie, a classic breed of sheep dog popular with area farmers and my favourite kind of dog, for it is friendly and does not bark.

Three days later, in the evening, as I approached the same location, I glassed and spotted five canids, all of them jet black. However, they were shy and my hope of getting a closer look was dashed. Another chance arrived on May 13, when there were six members of the pack out in the open, all of them black. The darkest three featured an area of lighter grey on the throat.



**Black Coyote in Elk Island National Park, Photo by Christopher Lee**

By late summer, the group appeared to have split up. On September 24, I saw two black coyotes trotting across a stubble field west of the lake. And on May 1 of the following year, I surprised two coydogs in the reeds along the north shore of Beaverhills Lake. One was dark-brown, the other mostly black. As it crossed open ground to the island, I could see that its throat and chest were light grey, its feet and the tip of its tail were whitish.

My last sighting of the coydogs was on April 10, 1997, not far from the willow pasture of the first encounter in 1995. Two of them were tan-grey, one was jet black, the other a piebald. The latter's head, chest, shoulders and rump were black, with an area of white on the neck and across the middle of its body, and a black tail that ended in a white plume.

In the late 1990s, I heard of a sighting of a black coyote well north of the lake, and at about the same time, naturalist Brian Genereux observed a group of four at Whitford Lake, which is about 60 km northeast of Beaverhills. Two of these animals looked like regular coyotes, two others were black. A few years after that, Brian saw a coyote and a large shepherd-like dog travelling together at Whitford Lake.

As Jim Brohman and Dennis Baresco remarked in their respective articles, black fur is rare in coyotes, but common in wolves. The well-studied wolves of Yellowstone, which were reintroduced in 1994 with a dozen animals caught in western Alberta, are now about 50 percent blacks. In a recent paper (Hedrick et al. 2014) two scientists discuss the gene flow of black wolves. The technical details of their paper are way over my head, but I was pleased when they invited me to contribute my data from Jasper National Park. There, over half a century of watching, I have recorded 241 black wolves and 110 greys. This comparison does not include repeat sightings of known packs during the same year.

**Dick Dekker, PhD**

## Grey Wolves, Black Wolves, Red Wolves, and Black Coyotes

In the standard textbook on Canadian mammals written by Ottawa zoologist A.W.F. Banfield (1974), the common species name given to *Canis lupus* was just wolf, whereas the American common name has always been Gray Wolf. Unfortunately, the American name, including its spelling, has now also been adopted in Canada. This is a pity, because this colour-based label clearly is a misnomer.

The present range of the Gray Wolf extends right across the continent from Montana to Minnesota and from Alaska to Labrador. But there is a marked difference between east and west. With very rare exceptions, all eastern North American wolves are a shade of tan-grey, resembling the coyote's pelage. By contrast, western Gray Wolves show extreme individual variation from black to white (Dekker 2009). In addition, it is well known that most Arctic wolves are white.

In our Rocky Mountain National Parks, melanism has always been common. In the 1940s, 55% of 80 wolves seen by park wardens were black, and in the summers of 1966–1985, the black percentage was 53% in 132 wolves that I watched at their dens in Jasper's upper Snake Indian Valley. In a wolf territory in the lower Athabasca River valley, where I have been looking for wolves for over 35 winters, the percentage of black rose to 73% in 1988 and 82% in 2013 (Hedrick et al. 2014).

Black wolves used to be common in the southern states of the USA, where wolves are a lot smaller than elsewhere and go by the common name of Red Wolf. In Mississippi and Florida more than half a century ago, the renowned American wolfers Stanley Young and Edward Goldman (1944) named two subspecies of the Red Wolf *Canis niger* and *Canis niger rufus*. This means that the name Red Wolf too is actually a misnomer.

In a recently published study of 114 canids from Missouri and Arkansas preserved in museum collections, black coyotes were identified as hybrids of coyotes and the small Red Wolves of that region (Elder and Hayden 2014).

### Dick Dekker, PhD

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## Eagle Update

The large Bald Eagle nest along the Strathcona River trail again produced three youngsters in 2015. The adults began the brooding process in late March, and the chicks fledged successfully in the third week of July. On August 8, all three were soaring together over the river. The nest tree, standing on the very edge of the cut bank, was at risk of toppling into the river at the next high water level, but the river did not rise much at all this past dry summer. While spending many hours watching the nest from a safe distance, I saw the eagles bring in a few food items such as fish and a duck, but also sticks and clumps of muddy plant material.



Dick Dekker

*Bald Eagles, Photo by Don Delaney*

## Nature Appreciation Weekend

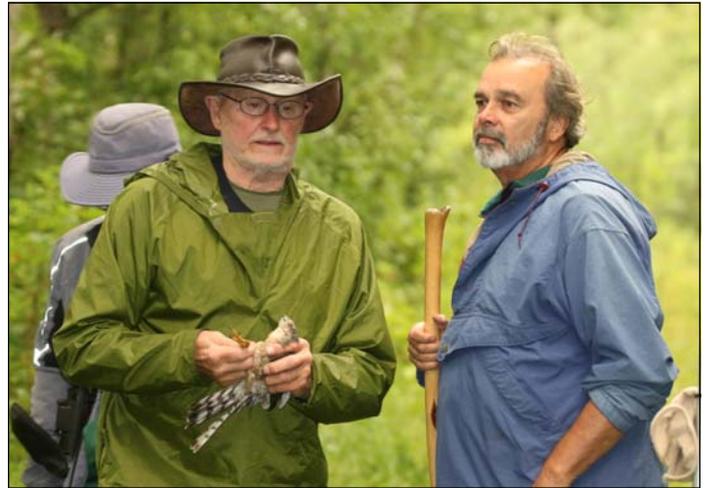
Club members enjoyed a great weekend at Miquelon Lake Provincial Park. Going into the weekend there was probably some concern about the forecast, but we weren't greatly affected by the weather. Our camping area had a very nice completely enclosed shelter with a big fireplace which we used as our breakfast and lunch location. A benefit of the cool, showery conditions was that we didn't experience many biting insects. Being adaptable and well prepared helped us all have a good time.

Rain delayed bird-banding procedures on Saturday morning, so unlike the other folks staying at the park, we headed to the beach! The lake is shallow and saline, with exposed mudflats, and is strongly influenced by fluctuating water levels. It is fed by surface and subsurface springs that are high in naturally-occurring salts and sulfates. Lower lake levels have concentrated the salts and sulfates, creating an interesting odour. Mudflats are quite extensive this year and shorebird numbers and variety were good. Highlights included exotic-looking Black-necked Stilts, a handful of Black-bellied Plovers, and a few Semi-palmated Plovers. Sunday brought a small flock of Wilson's Phalaropes spinning dizzily just off the shore and then a single Red-necked Phalarope for comparison. Over the course of the weekend we were able to approach various shorebirds very closely. As usual, Gerald Romanchuk suggested we study the Dowitchers intently to determine the colour pattern on the tertial feathers. Were they Short-billed or Long-billed?

Cooler temperatures limited the number of insects in the air; songbirds were observed feeding on the bountiful fruit along the forest edges. We encountered a typical migrating flock that included vireos, warblers, and thrushes, with some local chickadees happily joining the activity. The tally was a total of 59 bird species for the weekend, compared to 85 last year. A complete list is available through the website at [enctripports.blogspot.ca](http://enctripports.blogspot.ca).

Once it was safe for the birds, Janos Kovacs and his crew opened the mist nets. We welcomed several family groups from within the park who came to view this work. To the delight of all, including the banding crew, a Sharp-shinned Hawk was captured! In 60 years, Janos has only banded about 6 Sharpies. Other crowd favourites included Ovenbird, Gray Catbird, and Canada Warbler. A total of nine species were captured, carefully weighed and measured, then released. Those hatch-year Tennessee Warblers were tiny, weighing about 9 grams, with one being aged as two weeks! Janos assured us that all the birds were of "good" weight, so the park has been providing plenty of food for songbirds this year.

Gerald's presentation, *Dragons for Dummies*, encouraged



Top Photo: Art Hughes (right) and Janos Kovacs (left) holding a Sharp-shinned Hawk. Bottom Photo: Art Hughes untangles a warbler from a mist net.

### *Photos above by Janice Hurlburt*

club members to learn these winged creatures by concentrating on common distinctive species in our area. He advised that Odonates are split into two suborders, damselflies and dragons:

Damselflies are smaller, with very slender abdomens and matching forewings and hindwings. They hold their wings together and parallel to the body or slightly apart. Watch for these species:

- Spreadwings hold their wings slightly apart.
- The pond damsel family includes the familiar Bluets with their long bright blue abdomens.
- Sprites are tiny and iridescent green.

Dragonflies are larger and fast-flying. Their forewings are narrow compared to their hindwings, and their wings are outstretched at right angles to the body. There are four basic groups of local dragons:

- Darners are the largest.

- Clubtails have widely separated eyes and the tip of the abdomen is enlarged.
- Emeralds have brilliant green eyes and metallic green body parts.
- Skimmers spend a lot of time perched.

Once you’ve got a feel for the families, your next step



**Dave Ealey and Darner Dragonfly,  
Photo by Gerald Romanchuk**

could be to use a field guide to identify some of the species by colour patterns. Gerald cautioned that some Odonates have very subtle physical differences that are seen only under magnification. We were able to identify a Variable Darner by the stripes on the thorax, and we saw a number of Bluets near the lake.

Patsy Cotterill explained that Miquelon Lake Provincial Park is at the southern edge of the Dry Mixedwood Natural Subregion of the Boreal Forest Natural Region in Alberta. Aspen-dominated forest with scattered white spruce interspersed with wetlands define the area. The fens (with low water levels) are surrounded by extensive sedges, water-loving grass-like plants. Beavers have influenced the area, with their channels radiating outward from the wetlands. This information was reinforced when one of our members fell into a hidden channel.

Open areas bloomed with showy asters and goldenrod. The forest understory consisted of beaked hazelnut, prickly rose, wild sarsaparilla, red-osier dogwood, and Canada buf-

faloberry. Although it is a herbaceous perennial flowering plant, the lifestyle of buffaloberry has a lot in common with that of mushrooms. We found an extensive patch of Indian Pipe, also known as ghost plant, *Monotropa uniflora*, in the shady, moist leaf litter of the aspen woods.



Gerry Fox spotted a large colourful mushroom. Patsy identified it as *Amanita muscaria*, commonly known as fly agaric, adding, “It is both common and hallucinogenic!” This white-gilled, white-spored mushroom is usually illustrated as having a red cap but specimens in our area are typically yellow to orange and so may belong to either the *guessowii* or *formosa* variety. (The experts are



**Top Photo: Indian Pipe  
Bottom Photo: Patsy Cotterill and Gerry Fox  
examine a colourful mushroom  
Photos above by Ann Carter**

still debating the taxonomy.) Mushrooms are the fruiting bodies of fungal species that exist largely as white, thread-like filaments branching out through the soil. The filaments of fly agaric, like those of many mushrooms, wrap themselves around the roots of various trees in a mutually beneficial or symbiotic relationship. (Thanks to Patsy for these plant notes.)

Photography is a complex topic, and Steve Knight provided some basic information for us to digest. Automatic camera settings often aren't able to cope well with nature photography, and Steve encouraged members to try making their own setting choices.

Exposure has three components:

- Aperture size (F-stop: smaller number = bigger lens opening, bigger lens opening = more light).
- Shutter speed.
- ISO. The lower the ISO number, the less sensitive your camera is to the light, while a higher ISO number increases its sensitivity.

Changing any one of these components may make it necessary to adjust the other two. Due to its complexity, Steve recommended using an automatic setting for flash photography.

Steve reminded us to spend time trying different settings and techniques with our equipment. He suggested we choose our general camera settings in the field before we spot a target and always use continuous focus! (Servo AF). His fieldcraft suggestions include:

- Ensure a steady camera stance.
- Get the subject downlight, with the wind behind your back.
- Get low (and wear clothing to allow this).
- Approach obliquely, don't look at the subject, shoot, and stop. Wait for the subject's head to turn sideways or toward you. Take photos in bursts rather than single shots.

For those doing cell phone photography, use the HDR option and don't zoom in on your subject, as you're better off cropping the shot later. Technology is changing quickly so it's worthwhile to update your camera every few years.

Passionate about his craft, Steve emphasized that we could alter our camera settings to capture images in the form most meaningful to each of us.

Colleen Raymond set up a moth sheet Saturday night. Her description said the set-up included "a bug zapper light sans the zapper..." or, more specifically, FL15BL, which has high output in the UV, but also has output in the visible region. A variety of moth species were drawn to the light and also to the side of the shelter building. We identified the following, among others:



**Photography demonstration by Steve Knight (right).  
Photo by Gerald Romanchuk**

- Black-rimmed Prominent, *Pheosia rimosa*
- Once-married Underwing, *Catocala unijuga*
- Large Maple Spanworm, *Prochoerodes lineola*
- Bold-feathered Grass Moth, *Hepetogramma per-textalis*

One butterfly was observed, Milbert's Tortoiseshell.

While clearing the campsite on Sunday, John Jaworski (using his coffee cup!) rescued a large green caterpillar from the roadway. We spent some time with this critter and after consulting Albertaleps about the identity, Colleen confirmed it's from a Sphinx Moth, *Pachysphinx modesta* – the BIG one!



**Photo by Ann Carter**

As always, the evening campfires were a treat, with topics ranging from birding locations, to meteors, to the possibility of an alternate universe. Mama moose stopped by to check out the laughter and lively discussion. Thanks to all the participants for your cheerful enthusiasm, and kudos to the leaders sharing their talents. Well done!

**Ann Carter**

## Field Trip Reports



*Sharp-tailed Grouse (above); Snow Geese (below), Photos by Gerald Romanchuk*

### Central Alberta, April 18, 2015

A dozen of us birded an area that included Leduc, Bittern Lake, Camrose, Bawlf, Rosalind, Donalda, Big Knife Provincial Park, Halkirk, the area between Sullivan Lake and Hwy 56, Tolman Bridge, Trochu, and Dry Island Buffalo Jump. Few of us had birded much of this area before, so it was a bit of a journey into the unknown, but we (or rather I) only got lost and stuck once, and it seems like the area might well reward more thorough investigation in future. It was a long trip but both birding and company were great, so how could we stop? Weather was mainly sunny but with a brisk wind throughout.

Lots of birds were on the move. We saw many thousands of geese (including a large flock of white geese that were entirely Ross's Geese), a remarkable field full of Sandhill Cranes near Donalda (at a location where roadside stopping was nearly impossible), and a good number of raptors (Including a Prairie Falcon near Bittern Lake and a Turkey Vulture between Donalda and Forestburg), some lingering winter visitors, and a nice group of Sharp-tailed Grouse near Stonelaw. Unfortunately the wind had shifted, coming from the west by the time we got to Dry Island, so the raptors were soaring on the wrong side of the valley for easy viewing. As always, however, the scenery alone more than compensated for this!

The full tally for the day was 56 species.

Thanks to all for their participation and for turning up some great birds for the time of year.

**Martin Sharp**



### Snow Goose Chase Scouting, April 26, 2015

Our first stop of the day was the wetland across from the soccer fields in Tofield. Unlike in the previous two years, when snowbanks kept us from accessing the parking area, we were able to pause to view the recently returned Red-winged and Yellow-headed Blackbirds and the iridescent Grackles.

Green-winged Teals were a favourite. Rough-legged Hawk was another treat, and everyone admired the Mountain Bluebirds. Also notable were the hundreds of Yellowlegs we saw at Kallal Meadows, Northern Flickers found everywhere, and Rusty Blackbird at Francis Point.

Our group of fifteen tallied 62 bird species. Thanks to all who participated!

**Ann Carter**

## Field Trip Reports

### Hermitage Park Evening Walk, May 12, 2015

We had a large turnout of over 20 birders. Unfortunately there were almost more birders than birds! Things were pretty quiet, not sure if it was the breeze or what, but there wasn't a lot of bird song. A few of the early-birders saw a couple of Pelicans on one of the ponds and had Bald Eagle and Osprey fly-bys. We did get one co-operative Yellow-rumped Warbler that amazingly stayed in the same spot for several minutes and let everyone get on it. And Nigel spotted a Bald Eagle perched across the river that the whole group was able to get.

We owe a determined Red-necked Grebe a great big Thank You. We saw one of a pair on the big pond swim out to one of the islands and come up with a big stick. He swam all the way back to his nest and incubating female carrying said stick. The female seemed very unimpressed! But the time it took to watch all this put us in the right place for a Black-crowned Night-Heron fly-by. The bird obligingly landed on top of a spruce tree and let the whole group get great looks through the scopes. Probably would've missed it if it weren't for watching that grebe.

We saw 21 birds.

**Gerald Romanchuk**



*Bald Eagle, Photo by Gerald Romanchuk*



### Emily Murphy and Kinsmen Parks, May 24, 2015

Thirteen of us had a pleasant walk on the hill trails above Emily Murphy Park, the connecting trail between Emily and Kinsmen, and a hill trail in Kinsmen Park.

Brian Stephens arrived early and on a preliminary walk before the group ventured out, he observed a Mourning Warbler and Chestnut-sided Warbler. The rest of the group did hear the song of the Mourning Warbler but, alas, did not see either of those. Brian also gave us a cool lesson on distinguishing the songs of Yellow Warblers and Chestnut-sided Warblers.

We had Yellow Warblers singing all around during the walk, during which we saw 21 species.

**Don Delaney**



*Yellow-rumped Warbler, Photo by Don Delaney*



### Roper Pond Constructed Wetland, June 3, 2015

Fourteen of us took a leisurely evening walk around Roper Pond Constructed Wetland. It was warm and sunny but a little breezy in some spots around the Pond. We got some nice close views of Clay-colored sparrows, Robins, and a particularly bright and colourful White-throated Sparrow.

Highlights were a Black-cap... er...-crowned Night Heron, called correctly by an enthusiastic young birder in our group, and a Swainson's Hawk feeding in a soccer field surrounded by Magpies trying to snatch its meal. Our total of 24 bird species also included a Spotted Sandpiper.

Water levels were lower than I've ever seen in the 3 or 4 years of visiting the area, especially in the smaller pond. We saw Common Alpine, Silvery Blue, and a Sulphur species of butterfly, as well as some excellent dragonflies.

Thanks, Gerald, for keeping the bird list! Thank you all for coming out!

**Colleen Raymond**



***Black-crowned Night Heron***  
**Photo by Gerald Romanchuk**

### Strathcona Riverside Trail, June 17, 2015

Five Nature Club members and Nina Rach, a visitor from Houston who was here to present to the Orchid Society, saw or heard 33 species on the Strathcona Riverside Trail. Nina asked about Red-necked Grebes, so we took her to Beaumaris Lake after the walk, where she got her first and very close sighting.

**Don Delaney**

### Battery Creek in Devon, June 6, 2015

We had 14 participants for this pleasant early summer trip (sunny, low 20s, minor wind). We left at 9:30 a.m. and returned to Edmonton at 1:00 p.m. It was a first for the ENC; most members were impressed and are likely to come back in the future.

We met at the intersection of Michigan St. and Oakland Blvd. and followed Battery Creek to the Lions Club Campground at the North Saskatchewan River. We travelled downstream at the top of the ravine (single track) and returned through the valley bottom (~3 m wide path). Both parts have steep sections between the tablelands and the river bottom. The ravine runs west–east for about 1 km, then south–north for 1.5 km. The ravine landscape is quite similar to that of West Edmonton ravines such as Wedgewood and Wolf Willow, but more pristine. Of concern to naturalists is the use of the ravine for mountain biking, including national racing events; at present, the disturbance is limited.

Highlights of the trip were a Hairy Woodpecker nest with a noisy brood and very active, harassed mom and dad, as well as a Yellow Warbler nest with two pale eggs.

Doug Macaulay kept track of our list of 33 bird species; the list is also available as S23829706 on eBird.

Doug also kept a list of 8 butterfly species. Several cicadas were observed resting on aspen branches. David, the youngest member of the group at age 10, caught one and held it up for all to see and photograph.

On the plant side, I found the quite extensive poison ivy patch at the top of the ravine noteworthy; I don't recall ever having seen one in Alberta. Other noteworthy plants included Fairy Bells, Solomon's Seal (false star-flowered), Blue Columbine, Purple Clematis, Wild Gooseberry, and Swamp Current, Beaked Hazelnut, and Tall Lungwort. A much more complete plant list produced by Patsy Cotterill is issued as a separate report on the ENC website under Field Trips ([www.enctripreports.blogspot.ca](http://www.enctripreports.blogspot.ca)).

Special thanks to the Macaulay family (Karen, Al, and Doug), who mapped out our route, shared their knowledge about recent sightings of wildlife, and provided insight into current conservation issues. The Macaulays are to be commended for their ongoing campaign to protect the Battery Creek Ravine!

**Hubert Taube, with input from Doug Macaulay, Patsy Cotterill, and Shirley Coulson**

## Field Trip Reports

### Century Day at Elk Island, June 13, 2015

On Saturday, June 13, the ENC ran its annual “Century Day” field trip at Elk Island National Park. The goal, of course, is to find 100 species of birds. The weather forecast didn’t sound good, supposed to get 15 mm of rain, so I was surprised when 15 keen birders showed up in the park at 7 a.m. Despite the forecast, it wasn’t too bad in the morning – overcast, a bit cool, and a little breezy, but no rain. The rain waited until we went for a longer hike in the afternoon!

We did the usual route, birding the marsh south of the main entrance, then up the parkway towards the Astotin Recreation Area, stopping at various wetlands and trailheads.

The first good bird was on the Bison Loop, but it had to wait for a herd of Bison to stampede past us. As leader, I had to stifle my normal instinct to run away screaming like a little girl. Instead I put on an air of confidence standing behind all the women and children! Seriously though, when we started walking out in the open, the herd that seemed to be grazing peacefully near the woods started running off at full speed towards the big pasture. There were a few questions about how smart it was to stand around in the open with large wild animals stampeding, but I convinced everyone that a group of birders was much scarier!

Vince had seen an Eastern Bluebird out there a few days ago, and Emily spotted the bird after the stampede – a lifer for several people and I think possibly the first record for the park. Another decent sighting was a pair of Lesser Yellowlegs, only occasional nesters there.

We continued up the parkway picking up several birds. Always nice to have a Broad-winged Hawk circle slowly over the road when leading a tour. The Sandhills Trail was pretty good; we found Blue-headed Vireo, Boreal Chickadee, and Cape May, Magnolia, and Mourning Warblers.

I managed to get everyone soaking wet walking down some game trails and pushing through damp vegetation. It wasn’t hard to talk the group into going to the golf course clubhouse for a hot lunch. We picked up a House Sparrow while eating, for a total of about 80 species, as well as a few more participants, for a total of 23.

We scoped Astotin after lunch and saw several birds, including a few fairly close Western Grebes, and a Bittern that flew by. The choice to hike the Lakeview Trail wasn’t so good – we didn’t get a single new bird and it started pouring halfway through. We went up the parkway a bit and picked up stuff like Le Conte’s, Nelson’s, and Swamp Sparrows.

Then back around to the west side of Astotin. Brian spotted a Hooded Merganser on a small pond. While we were looking at that bird, a Pied-billed Grebe popped up. We picked up a Canvasback and Horned and Eared Grebes on Astotin. By then we were in the mid 90s and 100 was looking possible.

We went out the west gate and ran the perimeter of the park. New birds were seen left and right – Red-tailed Hawk, Mountain Bluebird, Black-capped Chickadee (!), Blue Jay (!), and American Goldfinch (!) put us at the Century mark. Not sure how we missed some of those in the park!

We found a few more birds before we quit for the day and ended up at 105, mostly due to some really sharp-eyed and sharp-eared birders! A relaxing wiener roast in a warm, dry cookhouse was a good end to a great day.

### Gerald Romanchuk



*Broad-winged Hawk, Photo by Gerald Romanchuk*

### Strathcona Science Park Banding Station, June 7, 2015

Bander Janos Kovacs and 4 of his volunteers welcomed 8 visitors from the ENC to show them how we capture and band the birds and what information is taken and recorded about them.

Species banded: White-breasted Nuthatch, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, House Wren, Alder Flycatcher, and Red-eyed Vireo.

Species recaptured: White-breasted Nuthatch, Red-eyed Vireo, American Goldfinch, Clay-colored Sparrow, and Yellow Warbler.

Additional species seen or heard: Red-tailed Hawk, Black-capped Chickadee, Tree Swallow, American Robin, White-throated Sparrow, and Gray Catbird.

Overall it was a lovely morning. We went for a walk on the boardwalk, where we saw a Prairie Ringlet, Swallowtails, a Common Alpine, and a “blue” butterfly. We also saw a Cicada and a Garter Snake. Back at the banding station we enjoyed excellent snacks provided by Janos and also had a good discussion regarding a photo taken at Point Pelee – was it a Black Poll or Bay-breasted Warbler?

### Toby-Anne Reimer

**Big Lake and John E. Poole Wetlands, June 17, 2015**

Thirteen of us went for a walk along the Big Lake path heading south from the BLESS Shelter. The most challenging part of the walk was finding a parking space, the lot being shared with those on the soccer fields. There was a strong chilly wind at first, but that soon dropped and it was a very pleasant evening. The water on Big Lake is the lowest I've ever seen it, so it looked a little sad. But we did see (or hear) some wonderful birds, 39 species in all. We had some wonderful fly-overs from Great Blue Herons, an Osprey with a fish, and an American Bittern. Barn and Cliff Swallow were nesting under the Ray Gibbons bridge. A very chatty Gray Catbird made a brief appearance but otherwise kept well hidden.

As we moseyed up the boardwalk at the John E. Poole wetlands we saw lots of Red-winged Blackbirds and swallows but no Black Terns this year. At the end of the walk we turned back and had just commented on the lack of Soras when we heard their distinctive calls and were treated to some nice close-up views of two of them. An obliging female Northern Shoveler feeding close to the boardwalk gave us an excellent view of her bill. "The bill has about 110 fine projections (called lamellae) along the edges, for straining food from water" [Cornell].

**Janice Hurlburt**



David

**Halkirk Farm, June 20, 2015**

It was a long drive to the McBride Miniature Horse farm just north of Halkirk, but the 10 of us who made the trek were treated to an absolutely wonderful day. Thanks to our hosts Noel and Shirley for guiding us to various locations on the property and sharing the history of the family farm. It's a magnificent property, with a large pond in front of the house, another behind, and a lake across the road. American Goldfinch were constantly flying in to the feeders near the tables in front of the house where we had our picnic lunch. There was a brief discussion over a starling that morphed into a young Red-winged Blackbird. Interesting finds included the sloughed skins of two Garter Snakes. We looked inside a nesting box with tiny swallows in it. We flushed a Mallard off a nest by the side of the road and got a good look at a healthy number of eggs. And of course there were the miniature horses (60 in total; 55 too many, joked Noel).

The keenest birder of the day award goes to 10-year-old David.

Thanks to Vince for keeping count of the 45 species seen (or heard) during the trip.

**Janice Hurlburt**

**Lu Carbyn's Property at Darwell, July 5, 2015**

We could have spent the entire time just standing at the spot where we started. Having parked our cars we watched 2 Common Loons swimming on the lake (no babies to be seen yet), with a beaver swimming close to shore. Rose-breasted Grosbeaks were flitting around the trail, a Catbird was singing away in the shrubs, a possible Yellow Warbler fledgling (see photo – I thought I saw a Yellow adult feeding it), and an Ovenbird heard singing off to the right. Birds were everywhere, and so were butterflies. It is a delightful spot in which to spend a morning, and we thank Lu Carbyn for hosting the trip and sharing his knowledge of the area. As we walked further up the trail the "two bird theory" came into play. I was hearing a Clay-coloured Sparrow but Claudia insisted she was hearing a Le Conte's. We tracked her bird down and were really glad we did – it put on quite a show (see photo). In an area of Aspen and Birch with a few Spruce, Lu put us to work planting some Spruce saplings with the hope of attracting Yellow-rumped Warblers in the future. Behind Lu's five-star outhouse we found a family of Ruffed Grouse, and on one of several wetlands we were treated to a pair of Eastern Kingbirds tending a nest in the top of a stump right in front of the bench we were sitting on.

It was a wonderful walk with an energetic and enthusiastic group. We saw 37 species in all, including a Ruffed Grouse with young.

**Janice Hurlburt**



Le Conte's Sparrow



Northern Crescent Butterfly

*Photos by Janice Hurlburt*

### Water Valley, July 18, 2015

Fourteen of us set out to bird the Water Valley area on an absolutely beautiful day. We started at Elkton and then worked our way west and south, spending the most time at Bill Bagnall Park, Winchell Lake, and Perrenoud Nature Reserve, with various short stops en route.

We found 67 species in all, including Spotted and Solitary Sandpipers, Eastern and Western Kingbirds, Western Wood Pewee, Hermit Thrush, and Western Flycatcher (with vocalizations typical of both Pacific Slope and Cordilleran).

On a trip to the same area the previous weekend I also found 12 additional species, including Sandhill Crane with 2 young and Wilson's Snipe.

#### Martin Sharp



*Western Flycatcher, Photo by Gerald Romanchuk*

*Photo below by Janice Hurlburt*



### Shorebird Trip, July 25, 2015

Twenty shorebirders showed for some fall shorebirding.

Now, the big key when you have that many shorebirders looking for shorebirds, is to head for some shoreline. So we started out at Cooking Lake, where we did indeed find shoreline and shorebirds – an awesome combination for a bunch of shorebirders!

The southeast part of the lake accessed by RR214 was pretty good. Tons of birds out there. The most numerous shorebirds were American Avocets and Red-necked Phalaropes, with good numbers of Lesser Yellowlegs and a few Pectoral and Stilt Sandpipers. We didn't see many small peeps, but managed to get on Baird's, Least, and Semipalmated Sandpipers.

I think it was Janice who found a recently dead but still intact Semi Sand. We were able to take a close look at the partial webbing (semi-palmation) between the toes that the bird gets its name from. Our trip leader also showed part of the group the way the bird had been molting from adult breeding plumage into winter basic plumage.

We headed south to Miquelon Lake and scanned the shore at the Hand Launch. Lots of gulls and ducks, etc., but not many shorebirds. Along with a few Avocets and Yellowlegs, we picked up some Black-bellied Plovers and a Willet.

During our lunch break near the Visitor Centre we watched several songbirds flitting around and saw a Yellow-rumped Warbler feeding a monstrous young Cowbird. A little later Ann watched what was probably the same bird being fed by three different species – Yellow-rumped, Red-eyed Vireo, and Cedar Waxwing. Seemed like the parental instincts were very strong! Any begging young bird drives them to feed it. Maybe they just want it to shut up? ;)

A stop at Joseph Lake was pretty quiet. Lots of shoreline, but no shorebirds, though we did get a variety of ducks and grebes out on the water.

A few of us made a last stop at the Lakeview access to Cooking Lake. A few birds were there, but the vertically challenged members had a bit of trouble seeing over all the vegetation. Lots of young ducklings out and about, Bonaparte's Gulls in good numbers, and a handful of shorebirds.

So we ended up with 16 species of shorebirds and overall picked up 67 bird species. We had a really nice day and got back to the cars shortly before it started raining!

**Gerald Romanchuk**

## Field Trip Reports



*Magnolia Warbler, Photo by Don Delaney*

### Fall Warbler Walk, August 23, 2015

Twenty-one of us met in Hawrelak Park for a stroll on the trails between Hawrelak Park and Emily Murphy Park. It was a perfect morning in cheerful company. We confirmed nine warbler species as well as many more birds.

Thanks to Brian Stephens for compiling the list, available on the Edmonton Nature Club website.

**Don Delaney**



*Red-naped Sapsucker, Photo by Gerald Romanchuk*

### St. Albert, August 29, 2015

We had a great turnout of about 30 for today's trip to St. Albert. We began the day by birding the trails around Lacombe Park Lake and then moved on to the Grey Nuns White Spruce Park. The day started overcast and slow from a birding point of view but picked up rapidly once the sun came out. All told we saw 44 species, with a very nice collection of warblers (14 species) and vireos (4 species). I'd like to thank Percy and Clare for the local intelligence that got us to the spots where the birds were, and Brian for keeping the list, which is available on the Edmonton Nature Club website.

**Martin Sharp**

## Marg Lewis



**LEWIS, Alice Margaret**  
November 24, 1922 ~ August 21, 2015

### Marg Lewis

Marg Lewis died on August 21, 2015, at the age of 92. She joined the Edmonton Natural History Club in 1974 and was on its executive from the mid-eighties until 2004. During most of that time, she was its membership secretary; she also established the club's archives. For several years ENHC executive meetings were held in her small house in the west end, where her peanut butter cookies were standard fare.

In 1989 Marg was the first recipient of the Edmonton Natural History Club's Appreciation Award (renamed the Robert Turner Appreciation Award after the ENHC and Edmonton Bird Club amalgamated to form the Edmonton Nature Club).

She was a lovely, compassionate person and she worked hard for the club.

**Pasty Cotterill**

## Editorial

I would like to thank all the authors and photographers who contributed to this issue of *The Parkland Naturalist*. I encourage everyone to send in an article and/or photos. Our members are interested in your observations and experiences with nature. I'm always looking for field trip photos to go with the reports.

The deadline for *The Parkland Naturalist* September-December issue is November 30, 2015.

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

## Birding on Vancouver Island

There are many trails and birding spots around central-Vancouver Island that we would like to tell you about. We birded mostly in the area from Parksville (north) to Cowichan Bay (south) to Cowichan Lake (west) from January to March, 2015. We saw 119 species, of which 27 were life birds. We did not find many shorebirds at this time of year and few birds in the forested areas. The English River, Nanaimo River, Nanoose Bay, and Cowichan River Estuaries are great for winter birding. If you want to see lots of waterfowl, including Scoters, Brants, Harlequin Ducks, and more, go to Parksville/Qualicum Beach during the herring run in March. You can often see Long-tailed Ducks in Deep Bay.

We got a Nanaimo/Parksville area birding brochure at the Backyard Wildbird & Nature Store in Nanaimo. For the Duncan/Cowichan Valley trails, we obtained brochures from BC travel information locations.

We frequently birded with local groups to obtain tips about good birding locations, access to birding scopes, local birding knowledge, and social interaction. We found the birders here to be friendly. Many are very knowledgeable and were willing to answer our questions. Their scopes were important for seabird viewing.

The Backyard Wildbird & Nature Store in Nanaimo offers Sunday and Tuesday morning birding trips (<https://www.facebook.com/TheBackyardWildbirdStore>). Its

blog also lists special bird sightings with their locations (<http://www.thebirdstore.blogspot.ca/>).

The Cowichan Valley Naturalists' Society has a bird count trip every Wednesday morning. The society offers twice-monthly meetings on various topics in Duncan and a monthly shorebird count. Nature Cowichan is an excellent website to check for various offerings in the Cowichan valley area (<http://www.naturecowichan.net/>).

The Watershed Board offers a monthly nature-related meeting at the University in Duncan (<http://www.cowichanwatershedboard.ca>).

The Cowichan Estuary Restoration and Conservation Association is another interesting group that offers meetings and volunteer opportunities (<http://www.cowichanestuary.com>).

The Cowichan Land Trust offers a Nature Centre, opportunities to volunteer, advice, and films or speakers occasionally ([www.cowichanlandtrust.ca](http://www.cowichanlandtrust.ca)). We also did some volunteering with the Nature Conservancy. Go to the What You Can Do/Conservation Volunteers tab in the NCC website (<http://www.natureconservancy.ca/en/>).

Other birding groups are the Victoria Natural History Society (<http://www.vicnhs.bc.ca>) and the Nanoose Bay Naturalists (<http://www.nanoosenaturalists.org/>).

**Tony and Jana Sneep**

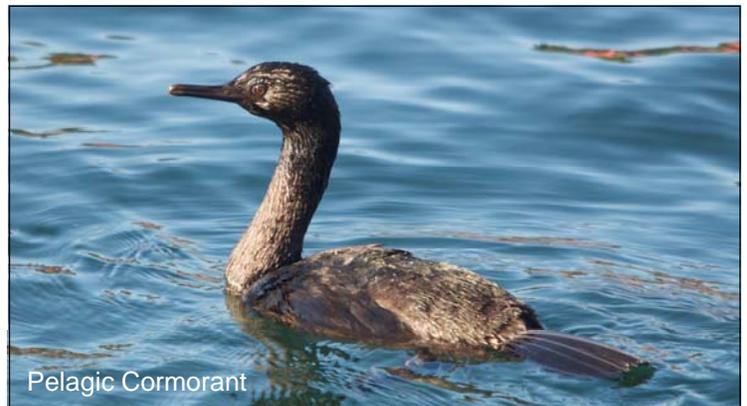
Long-tailed Duck, adult male in Winter plumage

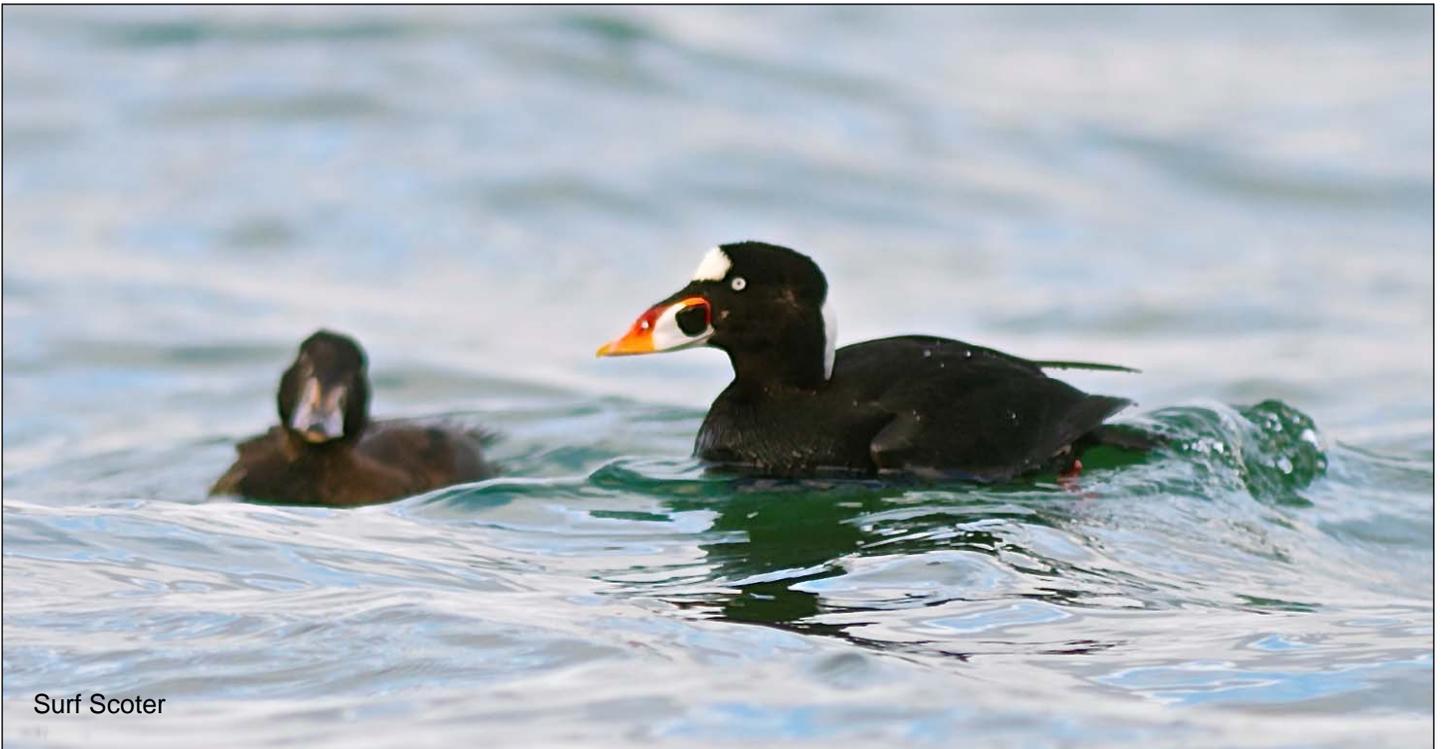


Bewick Wren



Pelagic Cormorant





Surf Scoter



California Quail

*Photos by Jana Sneep*

## Members' Photos



*Luke, Photo by James Fox  
(See President's Report on page 6)*



*Wood Frog  
Photo by Doreen Caddell-Letain*



*Bighorn Sheep (Waterton), Photo by Janice Hurlburt*