

THE PARKLAND NATURALIST



SEPTEMBER-DECEMBER 2016

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Black-footed Albatross



Northern Fulmar



Sabine's Gull



South Polar Skua

Chasing Birds – Riding the Big Boat



Riding the big boat...riding the waves...keeping control of your cookies...or not! More on that a little later, but please note that this report is not for those with weak stomachs!

Our “boat,” the *Frances Barkley*, is actually a fair-sized ship. It’s got a large main deck with a big enclosed cabin. Then there’s a smaller top deck with a commanding view and a small rear deck relatively close to water level. Everyone on board had different views and will have different stories. I spent most of my time on the lower deck hoping for better photo angles, knowing I was sacrificing seeing some of the birds.

We sailed out of Ucluelet under cloudy skies. While cruising down the inlet you see stuff like eagles and gulls and shorebirds. Near the end of the inlet by some rocky islands you start seeing cormorants and murrens and other alcids. Then it’s out on the open water on the way to La Perouse Bank and the Continental Shelf.

It’s a long haul, about 40 km out there without a whole lot to look at, but there were a few birds. A couple gave me some trouble. I heard them calling before I got a look at two shorebirds flying around the back of the boat. Never would’ve identified them, but a really sharp, quick, young birder got a couple of shots. He took them up to the experts, who confirmed the birds were Red Phalaropes. But...could I really count a sighting like that? It bugged me for a while, but I finally took Randy Dzenkiw’s advice. He said you have to loosen your standards on a pelagic!

We continued sailing on 3-metre seas. The constant rolling of the boat started to take its toll on a lot of people.

Cookies were being tossed all over the place. In other words, some folks were puking their brains out! It seemed very wasteful to do that much chumming without a lot of birds around! Sure felt sorry for the people in obvious pain and discomfort, but I was more worried for myself when I had guys on either side of me hanging over the rail. I’m proud to say my cookies stayed in their original packaging, though when it got really foggy and it was hard to see the horizon, the cookies almost left the shelf!

As we got further out we finally started seeing more birds. Sooty Shearwaters were flying over the distant waves, then some likely Pink-footed Shearwaters. The sky started to clear and we could see a fishing trawler off in the distance. The ship was surrounded by birds. We hit the mother lode! Our chummers went into action and soon we too were surrounded. It was bit of overload. Where do you look? Pink-footed Shearwaters were probably the most common, but there were impressive numbers of Black-footed Albatrosses. A large flock of Sabine’s Gulls was very cool. Flesh-footed and Short-tailed Shearwaters were called out, but I only got on Sooties. We saw three colour morphs of Northern Fulmar and got a great look at a South Polar Skua.

Storm-Petrels are the smallest of the tubenoses, and also the quickest. They were extremely tough to photograph. Trying to focus on small, quick birds on a rolling boat is not easy – you just get your long lens on the crazy things, and then the boat drops a metre. Got a lot of nice sharp shots of the waves!

So, we saw lots of great pelagic birds. Dozens of lifers were counted – several more species than I mentioned – and it was time to start back. The birding slowed down and there was time to catch up with everybody. Some were still recovering from losing track of their cookies. Others who kept the lids on their cookie jars were a bit easier to talk to. I found that bringing up the topic of projectile cookies could easily blow the lid off certain cookie jars, even if the jar was already empty. It was a great trip, at least for those of us who returned to shore with a full complement of cookies! Thanks to James Fox, the guides, and the chummers for all their good work.

Gerald Romanchuk

All Photos by Gerald Romanchuk

On the cover, Pink-footed Shearwater, Photo by Gerald Romanchuk

President's Report, Fall 2016



Our President, Ann Carter

Welcome, new and returning members, and thank you to the folks who attended the AGM – we appreciate your support. Minutes of the meeting can be found on the members' page of the website. Included are specifics of how we met club objectives through our activities of the past year.

Club membership has been stable and we've maintained a fairly balanced budget, so we're in good financial shape. Sources of revenue include membership fees, donations, magazine subscriptions, camping fees, and all ticket sales. Additional revenue comes from partnering with Nature Alberta to obtain grant monies. Note that ticket sales and subscriptions do not cover the full cost of our events or publications.

We welcomed new board members and elected officials: **Colleen Raymond** moved into the recording secretary position, and **Sean Evans** joined us as an executive director. The executive appointed new board member **Deanna Steckler** as the Bug and Spider Group leader, **Steve Knight** as the new email coordinator, and **Sean Evans** as field trip coordinator. Thank you to the executive, who guide the club, and to all the board volunteers. If anyone is interested in a future board position, please email anncartero@yahoo.ca.

We appreciate the work of former volunteers: **Diane Barrett** was our recording secretary for the past 2 years, and **Janice Hurlburt** coordinated all those field trips and nature walks over the past 3 years.

Congratulations to **Martin Sharp**, who was recently presented with our Chickadee Award (see page 14).

We sadly noted the passing of **Deirdre and Peter Demulder**, less than 3 months apart. Passionate members of the ENC and its predecessor clubs for over 50 years, they mentored us and led by example in conservation and wildlife observation. Steve Knight says, "Peter and Deirdre would encourage all of us to make a difference for nature in whatever ways we can, large and small."

Recent Club Highlights

The pelagic tour in September was a great success. Over 90 people boarded the boat in Ucluelet, BC, and braved rough ocean waters to view large numbers of seabirds, including albatrosses, shearwaters, storm petrels, and Sabine's Gulls. **James Fox** put in a lot of work to make it all happen!



*Pelagic Trip Photos by Steve Knight
Top: Pink-footed Shearwaters, Bottom: Sabine's Gulls*

Coming Attractions

Thanks to **Alan Hingston**, we're pleased to announce **Myrna Pearman** will be the speaker for our banquet on April 1, 2017.

Our Partners

Edmonton and Area Land Trust, after a lengthy process, has been granted a conservation easement for **Larch Sanctuary**. This 58 acre reserve is located in southwest Edmonton. Also added to the conservation property list is **Bunchberry Meadows**. The Nature Conservancy of Canada, with the help of EALT, has secured this 640 acre property just west of Edmonton. EALT now has partial ownership of the land and will be working to steward it in perpetuity. Visit ealt.ca to learn more.

Lu Carbyn is the new president of **Nature Alberta**, and other NA executive positions are available. A special membership rate is available to ENC members interested in joining NA and learning about nature initiatives throughout the province (for information, visit naturealberta.ca).

Respectfully submitted by **Ann Carter, President, ENC**

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Membership

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

Membership Rates for 2016/17:

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

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Indoor Meetings, Fall 2016

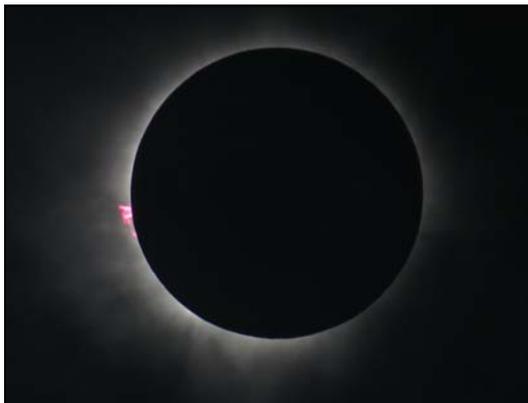
The 2017 Solar Eclipse October 21, 2016

Dr Douglas P. Hube, Professor Emeritus in the Department of Physics at the University of Alberta, is eagerly anticipating August 21, 2017, when he plans to be in Casper, Wyoming, to view a total eclipse of the sun. Doug encouraged all ENC members to take this opportunity next summer when the path of totality sweeps across the northern USA, a mere two-day drive south of Edmonton. He noted, "If you have lived your entire life within Alberta you cannot have observed totality and it will be the first opportunity to view this phenomenon in North America since 1979." He promised it will be spectacular and described totality as a "once-in-a-lifetime" opportunity, not to be missed. Doug described the conditions which must be met for a solar eclipse to occur and then explained how, when, and where ENC members could see this event...with one little proviso.

What Causes an Eclipse?

Remember, the moon circles the earth and the earth revolves around the sun. For an eclipse to occur, the moon has to be between the earth and the sun. During an eclipse, the alignment of the moon between the sun and the earth casts a shadow on the earth. The only time when the moon is between the earth and the sun is at the time of the new moon, which occurs every 29.5 days (roughly each month). However, an eclipse does not occur during each new moon, as the moon's orbit is tilted 5 degrees to earth's orbit around the sun. In consequence, at most new moons, the sun lies either above or below the path of the moon and there is no eclipse. When they do align, the moon blocks out the light of the sun, casting a shadow on the earth; in the dark part of the shadow (the umbra) the sun is completely obscured by the moon, giving a total eclipse; in the light part of the shadow (the penumbra) a partial eclipse will be observed. The path of the total eclipse is a narrow sinuous line when projected onto a map of the earth; in contrast, a partial eclipse will be visible over large continent-wide areas.

Totality



*A total solar eclipse, Photo by Janet Couch
Indonesia, March 2016*

Doug was very specific about "totality": that a partial eclipse of 50% or even 90% would not suffice and that the true spectacle was totality (100%). For this to occur, the total area of the sun must be obscured by the moon. The sky goes eerily dark, the temperature falls (bring a sweater), and birds go quiet and roost. You will see the "diamond ring," a burst of light that appears for a few seconds, followed by the spectacular sight of the corona of the sun surrounding the black circle of the moon at totality. Only at this time can the sun be viewed with the naked eye; otherwise, you must protect your eyes. Doug recommended #14 welding glass panes or purpose-made solar viewing glasses, but suggested you buy them sooner, rather than later, such will be the interest in this event.

When and Where

Totality will be seen only by those viewers who are on the centre line of the path of the eclipse. Starting in the Pacific Ocean, the path landfalls on the Oregon coast at 11:15 a.m. and will cross ten states on a west to east path. The path will leave the continent and head out into the Atlantic Ocean in South Carolina at 12:40 p.m. (all times MDT). Totality does not last long: for this eclipse the maximum length will be approximately 2 minutes and 40 seconds. Doug assured us that time goes "real quick" as you enjoy the spectacle and perhaps try to capture it on film as well. On either side of the centre line, totality will be shorter, and not far from the centre line (60 km either side), you will view not totality but a partial eclipse that becomes increasingly "partial" further away from the centre line. "Stay-at-homes" in Edmonton can view a partial eclipse in late morning on August 21, 2017, when nearly 70% of the sun will be obscured at 11:35 a.m. (MDT). Remember the "proviso" in the first paragraph? To view the eclipse it is necessary to see the sun in the sky. The sun can be obscured by clouds and, of course, the weather varies from day to day and place to place. Doug knows this to his cost. He has travelled the world to view total eclipses on seven or eight occasions and recalled one time in Tahiti when the clouds moved in seconds before the eclipse started. Doug has factored the weather into his calculations, which is why Casper, Wyoming, is his chosen viewing location. Not only is Casper on the centre line to give maximum length of totality, but at this site there is a higher probability of clear skies for viewing the spectacle. He cautions that 250 million Americans live within a day's drive of the centre line; expect heavy traffic and shortage of accommodations at the preferred viewing sites.

Next Time, Perhaps?

Eclipses are predictable to astronomers, both when they will occur and what area of the earth will be in shadow. One Saros period after an eclipse, the sun, earth, and moon return to approximately the same alignment and a nearly identical eclipse occurs. This happens every 6585.3 days (18 years, 11 days, 8 hours). The additional 8 hours cause the region of visibility to shift westwards 120 degrees, or about one third the way around the world. A Saros series lasts for approximately 1300 years, during which time approximately 70 total solar eclipses will occur as part of that series. Currently there are 40 active Saros

series numbered between 117 and 156. The August 21, 2017, eclipse will be the 22nd of the 77 members of Saros series 145. A Saros series returns to about the same geographic region at about the same time of day every three Saroses (approximately 54 years). This interval of 54 years explains why a total eclipse is usually a once-in-a-lifetime experience. On average, a given point on the earth's surface experiences totality every 400 years. Another total eclipse will cross the United States on April 8, 2024, on a path that will start in Texas and track north-east to Newfoundland, but that is further to travel than the August 21, 2017, opportunity and there is a greater likelihood of cloud further east. Lucky people in southern Illinois can experience totality twice in seven years, being on the centre line of both the 2017 and 2024 eclipse routes.

What about Alberta, I hear you say? Well, good news and bad news: the good is that Edmonton will be within the path of totality of an eclipse; the bad news is that it will not occur until August 23, 2044, which will likely be too late for this ENC member.

Alan Hingston



Wagner Natural Area: From Aquifers to Orchids November 17, 2016

Dr. Ben Rostron is Professor of Hydrogeology in the Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences at the University of Alberta. He is the current president of the Wagner Natural Area Society and one of only two American Orchid Society judges in Alberta. He is a keen and experienced photographer and showed numerous photographs he took at the Wagner Natural Area to illustrate the number and diversity of orchids present on the property.

Background

The natural area is named after William Wagner, who in 1971 gave 320 acres (130 ha) to the Province of Alberta. Natural areas are Alberta Government-owned and -protected lands with a dual purpose: to allow some low-impact recreation but also to preserve aspects of the province's biological and physical biodiversity. Wagner Natural Area preserves calcium-rich spring-fed marl ponds, willow swamps, and drier areas wooded with spruce, aspen, birch, and tamarack. Subsequent purchases have increased the size of the protected area to 620 acres (250 ha).

The Wagner Natural Area Society, a registered charity, was formed in 1983 to manage the leased property and was one of the first volunteer stewards in the province. Under the direction of its board of directors, the Wagner Natural Area Society has maintained an ecologically significant natural area through thousands of hours of volunteer effort. The property is now on the City of Edmonton boundary adjoining Highway 16 and the Highway 44 overpass in the vicinity of the Acheson Industrial Park: an "island of green" as development encroaches from both directions.

Wagner Natural Area is a mineral-rich fen complex. Within its 250 ha are found one-sixth of all the plants recorded in Alberta, 17 of 30 orchid species found in Alberta, over two thousand species of insects, three species of fish, six species of herptiles, 138 species of birds, and 41 species of mammals, including moose.

Ground Water Flow

Wagner Natural Area is underlain by sand and gravel deposited in channels at the end of the ice age. Ground water infiltrating a catchment area to the south flows northwards towards Big Lake, which is underlain by a deep channel filled with pre-glacial sand and gravel deposits. Ground water flows from topographic high areas (hills) to low (valleys) and the water table is a subdued replica of the ground surface. In low-lying areas where the ground surface is below the water table, seepage occurs and the water comes to the surface in the form of springs.

These springs are the lifeblood of the Wagner Natural Area. The spring water is rich in minerals, notably calcium carbonate, creating the mineral-rich fen complex. At the surface calcium carbonate precipitates from solution and is deposited as a whitish sludge – marl. The heart of the natural area is a complex of fens and larger marl ponds providing a variety of habitats for plants, notably the orchid species. Peat also forms in water-logged low-oxygen areas, and studies indicate the Wagner peatlands have been present for nearly five thousand years.

Geophysical studies, drilling test wells, and monitoring water levels have identified an up-gradient catchment area which must be protected if the ground water flow is to continue, in both quantity and mineral-rich quality. Encroaching development, including drainage and paving of areas, can change the recharge characteristics and minimize and intercept the ground

water flow necessary to maintain the natural area. Board members spend considerable time reviewing area structure plans and development applications to identify and hopefully oppose developments that will have a negative impact on the wetland.

Orchids

Ben showed a number of photographs illustrating the orchids found at Wagner and commented that their numbers each year and the species found reflect a variety of soil and moisture conditions. Generally, the peak season for orchids is around Father's Day, usually about June 20 each year. This year the peak flowering of the yellow lady's slipper orchid was two weeks early. If you know where to find them, it's possible to see orchids in flower at Wagner Natural Area between the third week of May and early August.

Yellow lady's slipper orchid can grow in profusion, and Ben noted this year an unusually high percentage (20%) of double-stemmed plants. The sparrow's egg (Franklin's) lady's slipper orchid typically flowers two weeks after the yellow. Ben showed the variations in the colouring of the round-leaf orchids, which typically flower during June and have a flower shaped like a Christmas tree ornament. He noted that certain orchids with very small flowers were pollinated by mosquitoes, which can be very numerous, to put it mildly. The large round-leaved bog orchid was interesting in that it flowered for three years and has not been seen since; it could be twenty years before it flowers again. The presence of bog-adder's mouth orchid was important, as it was necessary to move the proposed location of the Highway 44 overpass to protect it. The area is also home to several unusual carnivorous plants, including sundew, bladderwort, and butterwort.

Ben noted similarities between botanists and birders, in that both are familiar with the splitting of species and hybridization between similar species, though botanists are concerned with LGJs (little green jobs – six to eight very similar orchid species), rather than the LBJs (little brown jobs) that challenge birders' identification skills!

The Wagner Natural Area Society is to be thanked for protecting this microcosm of the boreal forest with its interesting hydrogeology and rare and unusual flora so close to Edmonton.

Alan Hingston



**Wagner Pond Sign,
Photo from
www.wagnerfen.ca**



Yellow Lady's Slipper Orchid, Photo by Ben Rostron



Bog Orchard, Photo by Ben Rostron

Birds of Christmas: Taking a Closer Look December 16, 2016

Dave Ealey started the evening by trumpeting his enthusiasm for the tradition of Christmas bird counting. He reminded us that Edmonton recorded its first count back in 1906 and after a few misses has now participated continuously for 68 years. It was great to have some brand-new participants in the crowd.

With the audience now wide awake, Janice Hurlburt stepped to the podium to share her experiences with yard birds.

They started when her family moved to a mature city neighbourhood, into a house with a large window overlooking the treed yard. Janice found she couldn't ignore the wildlife activity and ventured into the world of bird watching. Since then Janice has embraced the art wholeheartedly, participating in citizen science projects such as eBird, Christmas bird counts, and Project Feeder Watch. She also has her own personal photography project and has "captured" 47 species in her yard. Janice says that as her interest grew, so did the length of her camera lens!



*Dave Ealey,
Photo by Gerald Romanchuk*

Members enjoyed those great photos and a video of swarming Redpolls. We understood the challenge and excitement of photographing four woodpecker species in one day and followed through the identifications of some of her birds. She has been fortunate enough to have some winter rarities such as goldfinch, robin, shrike, and starling. Over a weekend last March, Janice's yard yielded 21 species! Janice pointed out that while some species are attracted to the area by shelter, water, and bird seed, predatory Merlins and Sharp-shinned Hawks are attracted by the other birds.



Janice credits the ENC with helping build her skill in identifying and photographing birds. We appreciate her giving back with a presentation that was entertaining, informative, and beneficial for new birders. Thank you, Janice!

Ann Carter

Link to videos: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bci1EfADd98>



Northern Flicker (above), Red Crossbills (above right), Photos by Janice Hurlburt

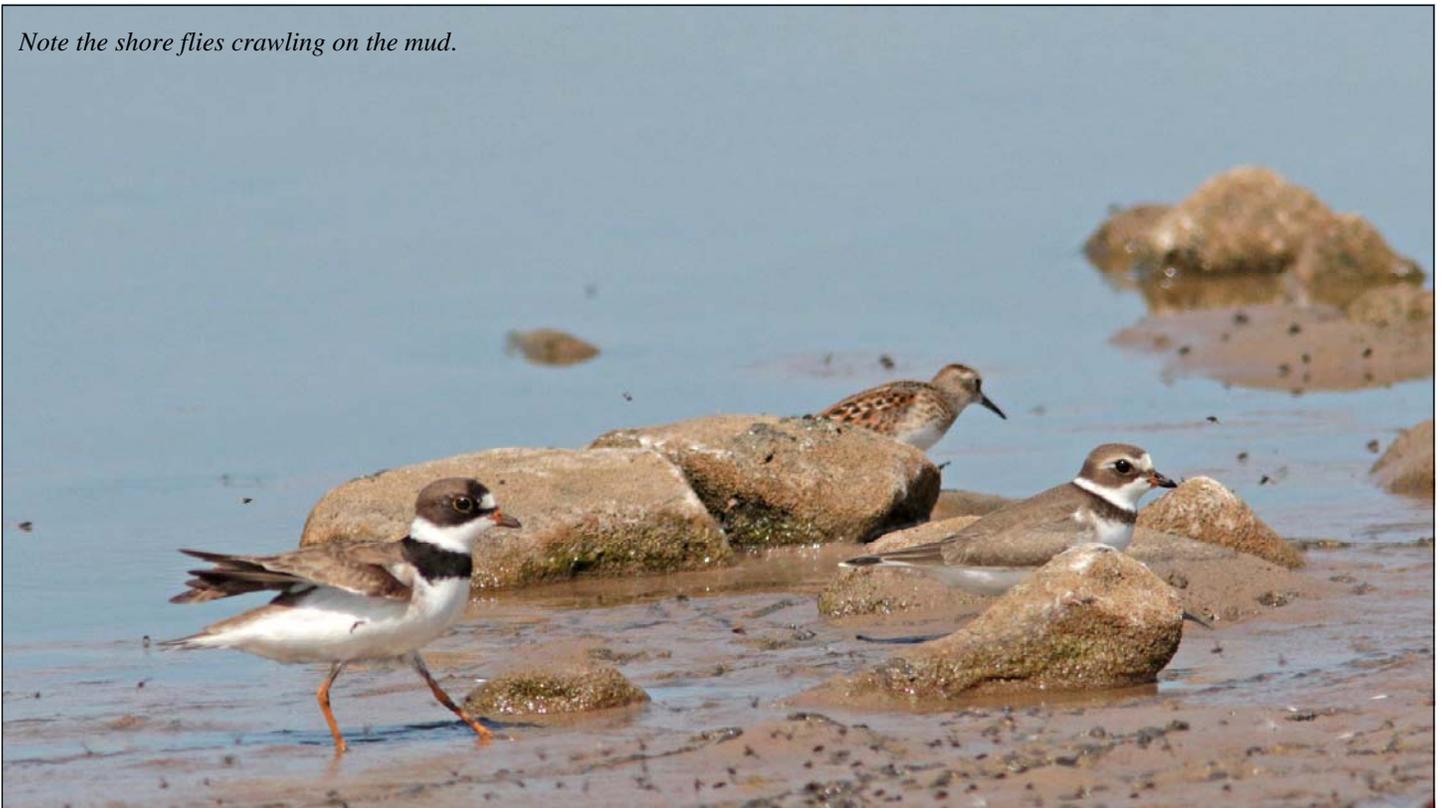
Fall 2016 Birding Season at Cooking Lake

In the spring of 2009 – a year or so after once-famous Beaverhills Lake had completely dried up – I began seasonal bird surveys at Cooking Lake and continued until the fall of 2016. This past year the birding season seemed to come to an early end on October 6 when a major snow-fall discouraged me from walking the standard 5 km route along the southeast shore. However, to my surprise, the lake was still free of ice in the last week of October, and the number of waterbirds was quite unexpected.

Due to a series of years with lower than average precipitation, the lake level had dropped drastically and mudflats widened, creating ideal habitat for migrating shorebirds. After a productive 2016 spring season, the return of Arctic-nesting species began on July 2 when I saw a flock of a dozen or so sandpipers on the south shore. One week later, two or three small groups flew by and a dense aerial flock of some 150 peep careened back and forth in the distance, the way shorebirds do when attacked by falcons.

Semi-palmated Plovers, Photo by Don Delaney

Note the shore flies crawling on the mud.



On July 16, hundreds of sandpipers were foraging along the central south shore, and three days later I estimated them at two or three thousand. Checking the same stretch of shore on July 23 and 26, I saw very few. With extensive mudflat habitat around the lake, local shorebird presence varied. There could be a large aggregation of several species at one access point to the lake and none a few

kilometres away. Peregrine attacks cause sudden shifts in shorebird distribution, leading to temporary abandonment of some feeding sites and missed opportunities – or duplication of sightings – for birdwatchers. Of course, the comings and goings of migrating birds also depend on factors other than predation, such as the food resource and weather conditions.

On August 18, sandpipers again increased to an estimated 5,000 along the central south shore; two days later, all of them had gone elsewhere or left on migration. Changing from week to week, my shorebird counts showed a general drop by late September. On October 2, I saw no sandpipers along the entire southeast shore.

Migratory shorebirds that stop over on shallow water bodies in central Alberta feed on aquatic invertebrates that include a variety of insects and their larvae. Chironomid midges, locally called lake flies, are a major food resource. They come in a variety of sizes and may look like mosquitoes, though they do not sting. On warm

days, lake flies hatch in their billions and, during calm periods, hover over shoreline vegetation like a smoke screen. As reported in *The Atlas of Alberta Lakes* (1990), the University of Alberta conducted detailed studies of Cooking Lake's water quality during the 1960s. They found that chironomid larvae made up 92% of the benthic biomass in the lake.

The midge larvae go through several developmental stages. Some remain suspended in the water column, others attach to the bottom or burrow into the mud. They feed on the organic detritus of decaying vegetation. Called bloodworms, the largest larvae are 4 or 5 centimetres long and red in colour. At Cheyenne Meadows, a prairie wetland in Kansas, bloodworms were counted at fifty per square inch, which converts to about six per square centimetre. Estimates of bloodworms per square metre of lake bottom varied from 6,000 to 65,000.

Depending on the length and shape of their bills, the various shorebird species divide the midge food resource between them. Bottom feeders such as dowitchers turned out to be less common this fall than in past years, but so were surface feeders such as the Red-necked Phalarope. Scything the shallows with their upturned beaks, avocets were numerous, even exceeding last year's big numbers. Arriving in the first week of April, they increased to an estimated 2,000, and several hundred were still there on October 31. Respectively, these dates are a month earlier and later than given in the provincial bird books. The curious thing is that very few of these avocets were actually nesting and producing chicks at Cooking Lake.

An additional and more accessible food resource for sandpipers is a species of fly – about half the size of a common house fly – that can be incredibly abundant

along the water line, reaching densities exceeding 1,000 per square metre. Don Delaney took a photograph of these flies sitting on the mud and submitted his shot for comment to John Acorn, who in turn approached Dr. Matthias Buck, invertebrate zoologist at the Alberta Provincial Museum. The scientific name of these flies turned out to be *ephyridae*, and their common name is shore fly (brine fly in Britain). They feed on the biofilm of microscopic algae and other organic residue that stays behind on the wet shore after the water retreats.

Another bird species that takes advantage of the flies is the Franklin's Gull. These pretty, insectivorous gulls stayed all summer, in their thousands, although none are known to nest at the lake. Their aerial feeding flights are well known, and while swimming they pick up insects from the surface of the water. This past summer I saw a pedestrian foraging method that was new to me. Groups of gulls routinely marched along the shore line with half-open beaks, opportunistically swallowing flies that flushed just ahead of the gulls' approach.

For a more detailed report on non-nesting avocets and Franklin's Gulls at Cooking Lake, see *Nature Alberta*, Fall 2016 (available in pdf format by emailing ddekker1@telus.net).

Dick Dekker, PhD



Avocet pair in an after-mating ritual.

Parkland Plant Notes – Be a Star and Know Your Asters, Part 2

Part 1 of our introduction to asters in the Parkland Natural Region focused on white-flowering species. We turn now to the blue-rayed local species (which include the blue- or mauve-flowered forms of western willow aster and marsh alkali aster), most of which have broader leaves than the species we have considered so far (with the exception of flat-topped white aster). Perhaps great northern aster (*Canadanthus modestus*, formerly *Aster modestus*) is the most distinctive. The ray florets are an intense blue or violet, and the disc florets are whitish to slightly purplish. An important identifying feature also is the presence of small stalked glands covering the involucre and upper parts of the stem. A tallish, hairy-stemmed plant, it forms dense patches in wet ground, especially that with calcareous groundwater influence, and appears to like some shade. The abundant stem leaves are lance-shaped and broader than in most of the asters we have covered so far.

Red-stemmed aster (*Symphotrichum puniceum*, formerly *Aster puniceus*) may possibly be confused with great northern aster on account of the brilliant blue of its flowers, but it can be distinguished by its stout, reddish-purple stem with abundant stiff hairs and the fact that it tends to occur as single or a few tufted stems rather than forming patches. It is a tall, leafy plant of wet woods, lakeshores, stream sides, and ditches. The long involucral bracts are predominantly green and loosely spaced.

The following species have pale lilac or mauve-coloured rays.

Lindley's aster (*Symphotrichum ciliolatum*, formerly *Aster ciliolatus*) is distinguishable by broader lower leaves which are heart-shaped at the base and narrowed into a long stalk. The involucral bracts are green with white margins. The species is very common in woodland clearings and along edges, often being seen along trails through forests.

Smooth aster (*Symphotrichum laeve*, formerly *Aster laevis*) is equally common, but is a plant of grasslands, prairies, and other open areas, including roadsides. As its name implies, it feels smooth to the touch owing to a lack of hairs. Most of the leaves are lance-shaped and clasp the stem, but the lower ones are broader and have a winged petiole, and because of this and the similarity of the flower heads, smooth and Lindley's asters can sometimes be confused. However, the leaves of smooth aster have a pale green, somewhat whitish look and a harder texture, while those of Lindley's are deep green and softer to the touch and sometimes slightly hairy on the leaf midvein beneath. Smooth aster clearly demonstrates the character of overlapping, tile-like bracts which are white at the bottom and green and pointed towards the top. Habitat also provides a guide.

Showy aster (*Eurybia conspicua*, formerly *Aster conspicuus*) clearly deserves its name. A strikingly tall, robust plant of woodland edges, it has large, long-ovate leaves that are sharply toothed. The large flower heads with long, mauve rays form a flattish cluster at the top of the leafy stems. The involucral bracts overlap in several series and have a broad whitish base with green tips that spread out or bend backwards.

Photos by Patsy Cotterill unless otherwise indicated

Its cousin, or congener, Siberian or arctic aster (*Eurybia sibirica*, formerly *Aster sibiricus*) is typically a mountain species of open, gravelly areas, but I mention it because it has been found in Edmonton along gravelly stretches of the North Saskatchewan River. A low, spreading plant, its rays are purple or blue; its hairy bracts are purplish and so is the pappus attached to its achenes.

Now a word about additional species. The number of species in a flora can increase when new species move into the geographic area in question, but mostly they are "created" by changes in taxonomy. Among populations that were thought to be a single species, distinctions are made that result in some populations being given species status. To recognize these, the ordinary field botanist (as opposed to the professional taxonomist) needs updated keys. Local botanists Linda Kershaw and Lorna Allen have produced new keys to some families, and are planning more. I can forward these keys to anyone who is interested. The difficulty of the key depends upon nature; the closer the relationship between species and the more numerous the species the harder they are to separate.

Whether you want to identify your photos to species level, or seriously delve into the subtleties of variation and contribute to the knowledge of plant distribution, there is plenty of challenge in the hobby of field botany!

Patsy Cotterill



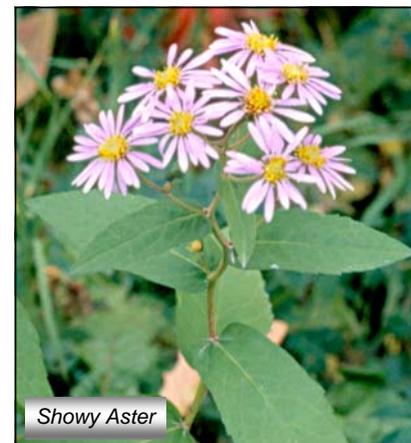
Great Northern Aster



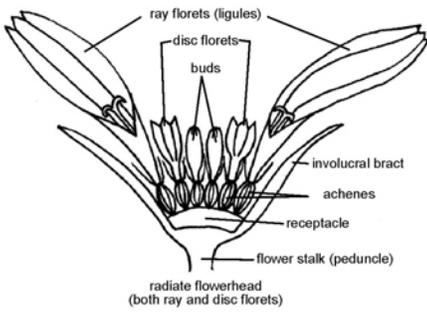
Red-stemmed Aster



Smooth Aster,
Photo by Victor Labelle

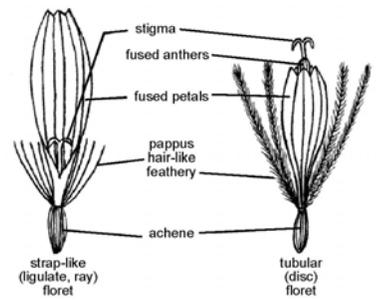


Showy Aster

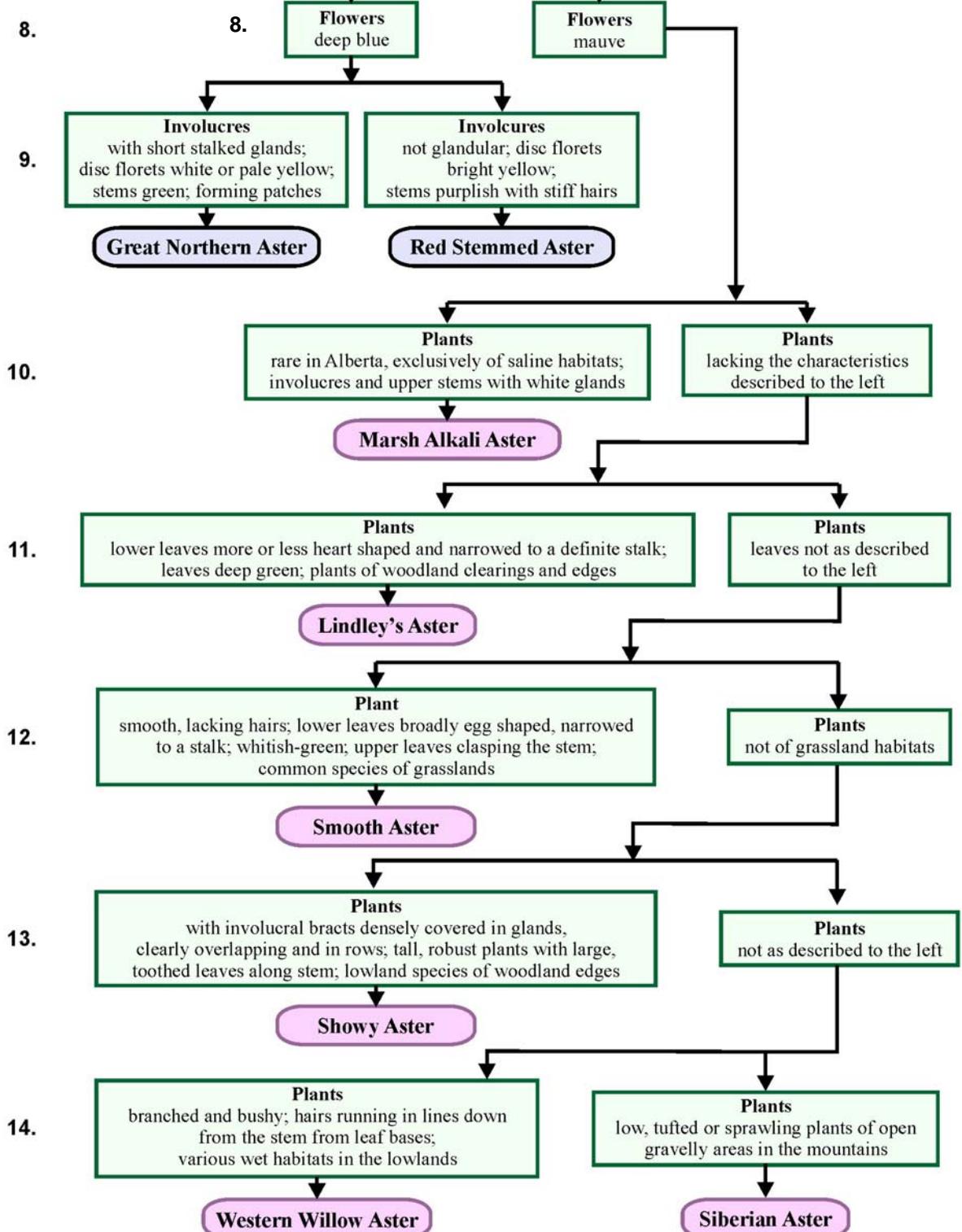


Diagrams (top right, top left,) from
 “Illustrated Key to the Asteraceae of Alberta”
 by Linda Kershaw.
 (published with permission)

Flowchart information provided by
 Patsy Cotterill
 (the entire flowchart was published in the
 May–August 2016 issue of the PN)



Asters ID Flowchart, Part 2



Chickadee Award



Martin Sharp

The Edmonton Nature Club's Chickadee Award acknowledges its "unsung heroes," those volunteers who make ongoing contributions to the club without receiving much recognition.

For more than five years, Martin Sharp has been leading driving tours, always remaining cheerful, even in the pouring rain. He has also shared his knowledge with club members through presentations at bird studies meetings, online discussions, and the speaker program, as well as articles published in our magazine, *The Parkland Naturalist*.

Thank you, Martin. We appreciate you!

Martin Sharp (right), Photo by Janice Hurlburt



Editor's Notes

Happy New Year, everyone! We hope you enjoy the varied and informative content of this latest edition of *The Parkland Naturalist*.

Congratulations to James Fox for organizing a unique and very successful West Coast pelagic birding trip. Held on September 18, 2016, the event was well attended by club members. See our cover story by Gerald Romanchuk for trip highlights, with additional photos on page 32.

The recent deaths of longtime club members Peter and Deirdre Demulder were a big loss to their family, friends, and the nature community as a whole. This issue includes Alan Hingston's appreciation of their many contributions (page 30) and Dick Dekker's article about his friendship with Peter and some of their adventures exploring the backcountry together (page 28).

After serving as ENC's representative to Nature Alberta for many years, Lu Carbyn is now the president of the organization. Congratulations, Lu!

For his many contributions to the Edmonton Nature Club, Martin Sharp is the latest recipient of the club's Chickadee

Award. Please see the acknowledgement above.

On December 16, 2016, we enjoyed Janice Hurlburt's entertaining presentation, *Birds of Christmas: Taking a Closer Look*. Thanks to Alan Hingston for organizing this and all our other interesting and well attended indoor meetings.

The Edmonton Christmas Bird Count was held on December 18, 2016. Visit www.edmontonchristmasbirdcount.ca for more information on the count and its results.

I have excellent help putting together the magazine from Judy Johnson (copy editor) and from Jack and Pauline DeHaas, who distribute the hard copies to members.

The authors and photographers who submit their work to *The Parkland Naturalist* deserve a big thank you! There is no magazine without them. I encourage all members to put on their creative hats and send articles and photos to me at colwelld@shaw.ca.

The deadline for submissions to the January–April, 2017, issue of *The Parkland Naturalist* is March 30, 2017.

Dawne Colwell

The views, comments and opinions expressed in this publication are those of the respective contributors concerned only. They do not necessarily reflect the views or positions of the editor, the Edmonton Nature Club (ENC), its executive or any other representatives or agents.

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Field Trip Reports

Gold Bar Park, December 4, 2016

It was a nice December day for the 17 people who joined in on the walk. With clear skies and a temperature close to zero, it looked like a great day for birding. Things started off slowly, with just a few Black-capped Chickadees and a Red-breasted



Mallards, Photo by Joanne Bovee

Nuthatch at the feeders. Along the river there were a few Common Goldeneyes, and a fairly large group of Mallards. Gerald saw a female Gadwall fly by, and a female American Wigeon was with the Mallards.



Bald Eagle, Photo by Gerald Romanchuk

A few eagles flew by and got the ducks stirred up, but other than that there was not a lot of action in the river. We resorted to digi-scoping a White-breasted Nuthatch to break up the monotony. At the Rundle Bridge we encountered another Bald Eagle and tied off that list at a humble 9 birds.

From the bridge we headed up the bank and saw a few more species, catching glimpses of Rock Pigeons, Downy and Pileated Woodpeckers, and even a coyote. Still pretty quiet, though. We were at a crossroads at this point. Do we head back to the open area or take the high road near the residential boundary? Alan Hingston is a high road-taking type of guy, so with his advice we took said path and started seeing some very good December birds.

First Dave Ealey spotted an immature Northern Shrike, and shortly afterwards we encountered a group of Cedar Waxwings hanging out with American Robins. Bohemian Waxwings could be heard in the background as well. We all got a pretty good look at the Waxwings as Gerald explained the difference in under-tail colouring (white versus brown) of the two similar species.



Cedar Waxwing, Photo by Joanne Bovee



Townsend's Solitaire, Photo by Gerald Romanchuk

This turned out to be a very birdy area! We could also hear a Townsend's Solitaire, which eventually flew into view and gave everybody a good look as it went from treetop to treetop.

We finished strong with a Northern Flicker and a few more Pileated Woodpeckers. The mystery pipe in the woods did not have any birds nearby, possibly because of the snow machine set on blast close by or because the river was still flowing. All in all, it was a pretty decent day in Gold Bar Park, with 20 species.

Sean Evans

Cold Lake, November 19, 2016

Here's a free recipe on how to make a very "refreshing" field trip:

Ingredients

- coldest day in several weeks
- 30-40 km/h winds
- large lake with huge choppy whitecaps
- limited number of birds
- 13 birders with questionable judgement

Mix the questionable birders into 4 vehicles and drive them northeast for about 3.5 hours until reaching the large lake. Remove the birders from their warm vehicles and put them on the lake shore behind several scopes. Make sure they're all facing directly into the howling wind. Wait 5 seconds til they're all frozen to the bone. You now have a very "refreshing" field trip!

It's tough to describe just how biting the wind off the lake was. Some of the birders were bundled up like it was the middle of winter:



A lakescape shot like this doesn't illustrate just how painful it was to stand out there scoping for birds.



So, birding conditions were pretty challenging. We didn't really find many birds out there. No loons or grebes. Most of the ducks we could ID were Goldeneyes. There were only a few gulls in sight. However, one duck was a lifer, province bird, or year bird for several in the group – a female Harlequin Duck near the marina that had been reported a week or so earlier. She was nice and close and gave great views.

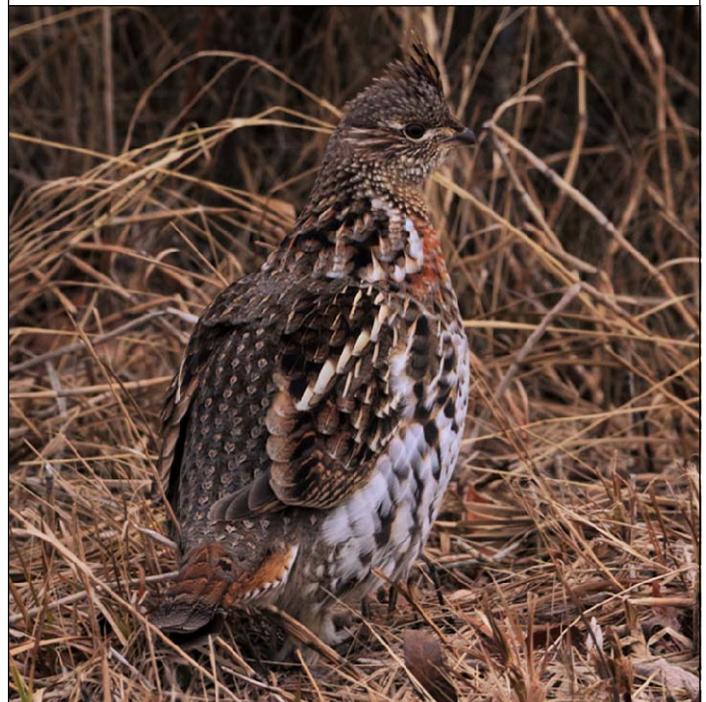


Female Harlequin Duck

Photos above by Gerald Romanchuk

Other birds seen included flocks of Bohemian Waxwings, a few Golden-crowned Kinglets, and Pine Grosbeaks. We were a bit surprised to see a couple of Kingfishers still hanging around a little creek.

Over near English Bay, Sean got this shot of a Ruffed Grouse:



Ruffed Grouse, Photo by Sean Evans

By 4:00 it was getting time to start heading back. The wind hadn't let up all day and on the dark roads back we got the bonus of some blowing snow. Luckily the highway conditions stayed fairly good and we all made it back without incident. The only problem that Colleen noted was the strange time vortex we travelled back through – the drive home seemed to take much longer than the trip out there.

By the time we got back to the city and went for dinner, most participants had regained feeling in their extremities!

Gerald Romanchuk

Whitemud Ravine, November 12, 2016*Photo by John Chapman*

On Saturday morning 35 participants, mainly club members, set off on our easy morning walk. The first birds we encountered were a flock of gyrating Pine Siskins, followed shortly by a Goshawk gracefully passing overhead. This energized the group as we walked down to the river in search of the ducks and Common Mergansers seen the previous day. After searching the mouth of the creek and the far shore of the river, we could only come up with four Mallards. Disappointed, we walked back up the creek, momentarily sidelined by a false alarm of a group of excited chickadees, to find 11 more Mallards ignoring us in the creek.

As usual, the first part of the walk was fending off raids of “starving” Black-capped Chickadees looking for hand-outs along with Red-breasted and White-breasted Nuthatches. At regular intervals, we heard Blue Jays and Black-billed Magpies overhead and the occasional Common Raven squawking up high. Driven to find the Black-backed Woodpecker, we collectively monitored every debarked spruce tree in the spruce lot. In spite of several reports of sightings the previous week, we were unable to find one.

Continuing on the trail through the spruce lot, someone pointed out the tall stump of a tree with a hole where a Saw-whet Owl nested the previous year. To our surprise, a Barred Owl was sitting at the top of the stump, scowling down at us. We had interrupted his early lunch of a flying squirrel, with the tail still in his talons. Several passing families with young children enjoyed a long look at the owl looking curiously down on them. Leaving the photographers behind, several of the more senior members moved on to investigate a loud tapping high up and picked out a Pileated Woodpecker. Another Pileated

*Barred Owl, Photo by Sean Evans*

Woodpecker flew in from a different direction shortly after.

The next challenge was to find crossbills and that Townsend Solitaire reported the previous day. Again, as with the Black-backed Woodpecker, our efforts were not rewarded. We finally found one Boreal Chickadee among the more common Black-capped Chickadees that responded to pishing. The long slow walk was winding down, with views of Downey Woodpeckers, a Northern Flicker, and a solitary gull flying high above. In response to a reminder to look for Rock Pigeons by the bridge to the parking lot, someone said, “We saw four when we first arrived.”

The calendar described this trip as “an easy walk through Whitemud Ravine to look for yearlong residents such as brown creepers, black-backed woodpeckers, and great horned owls. We will also see if any winter birds have arrived: common redpolls, pine grosbeaks, bohemian waxwings and crossbills. Suitable for families; and beginning birders are always welcome!” So much for the list of birds published in the calendar – we did not see a single bird on that list for the whole walk! Nevertheless, everyone agreed it was an enjoyable walk on an unseasonably mild November day, and we saw a respectable number of birds. Several new birders and non-members of the club enjoyed the trip, and we hope they were impressed enough to join the ENC.

John Chapman

Yellowhead County Grinder, November 5, 2016

Sean Evans came up with this name for our trip out west, and it turned out to be pretty accurate. After a long day and lots of long miles, it felt like we were ground up and spit out! We drove through a lot of country: west to Wolf Lake Rd, south to Elk River Rd, further west to Hwy 40, northwest to Hwy 47, then back up to Hwy 16. After dinner at Entwistle, we did get back to the city before 10:00!

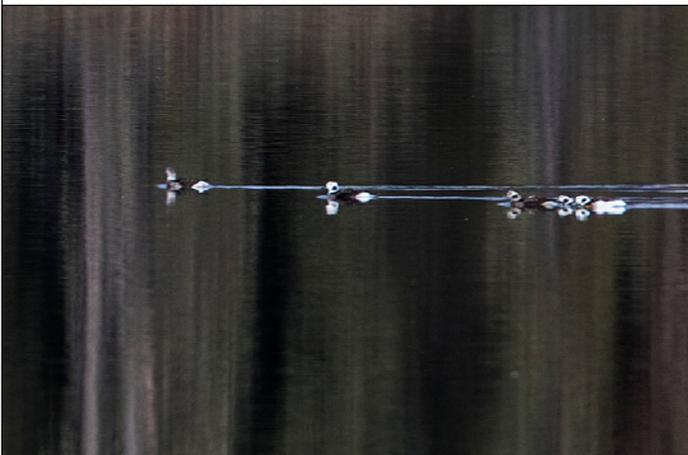
We left Beach Corner nice and early with a fantastic sunrise at our backs.



Photo by Jiri Novack

Our first stop was at Minnow Lake. We scoped the numerous ducks but couldn't come up with any exotic sea ducks. We did flush a grouse (probably Ruffed) and were entertained by a Golden-crowned Kinglet.

Further down the road at Wolf Lake, we enjoyed an absolutely beautiful late fall morning. The sun came out, the lake was smooth as glass, and the temperature was way above normal for the time of year. We deployed the scopes and looked through quite a few more ducks. Barrow's Goldeneye seemed like a nice find, and then a semi-exotic duck was seen – Long-tailed Ducks, 5 of them, more than I've ever seen together in Alberta.



Barrow's Goldeneyes, Photo by Gerald Romanchuk



Gray Jay, Photo by Sean Evans



Walking through the two campground loops, we soon sensed we were being followed. The threat wasn't too serious: we were being stalked by a gang of Gray Jays. Sean caught one dipping its toes into the lake.

Otherwise it was pretty quiet – a few Boreal Chickadees, a single Red Crossbill, and Emily Gorda found us a Three-toed Woodpecker.

Brian Stephens did spot something very unusual, a door hanging in the middle of the woods.

We decided the only plausible explanation was that it was a portal to another dimension. The fearless leader took one for the team and went through, but nothing seemed to change. I looked at Brian and Sean and Jiri and none of them looked any better!

Continuing on with the route, things got really slow. We checked every lake and campground. One of the big targets was Spruce Grouse. Sean needed one as a lifer. But the thing about Spruce Grouse is you can't just go looking for one. They'll pop up when they're good and ready. I told Sean it would help if he thought like one. He tried eating some spruce needles to get into character, but that wasn't good enough. No SPGR luck for Sean!

Sean Evans



The last birding spot was Fickle Lake. Gerry intently worked the scope and found another Long-tailed Duck, a Common Loon, Western Grebe, and assorted other ducks.

Then things got a little batty. Emily Gorda spotted something hanging onto a screen on the outhouse:



The critter was a small bat. Maybe a Little Brown?

The poor thing picked a bad spot to roost. We were quite sure it was dead, but tried unsuccessfully to resuscitate it and move it to a more sheltered spot.

While looking at the bat, we caught yet another ENC member who can't tell which washroom to use. Not sure what we're going to do with these guys!!!

Sean Evans



We started back for the city after enjoying some really nice weather, some great scenery, and excellent company. Most of us picked up a year bird and one person got a lifer.

Gerald Romanchuk

Photos by Gerald Romanchuk unless otherwise indicated

Owl Prowl in Memory of Ray Cromie, October 30, 2016

This past Sunday 25 of us toured around north of the city looking for owls and other birds. We were remembering our good friend Ray Cromie, who passed away a year ago.

Leaving from Sherwood Park, we cruised out towards Josephburg and the Vinca Bridge and continued further north. We saw a few Rough-legged Hawks, ravens, and magpies, but no owls. One of the most important stops of the day was at the Waskatenau truck stop for the best cinnamon buns in Alberta!

We took side roads up towards Long Lake PP, managing to find the muddiest roads around. We scoped the lake at the park and saw some loons, grebes, a few ducks, and Bald Eagles.



On the stream-side trail towards the B loop, we enjoyed views of the beaver pond and all the work the big rodents have been doing.

As we got up to the top of the trail we heard a few Blue and Gray Jays calling. They sounded a bit angry, and sure enough someone saw a large owl-like bird fly off. We tried chasing the bird through the bush and eventually Connor Charchuk and Sean saw a Barred Owl being chased by a Pileated Woodpecker. The owl slipped off and despite more bushwhacking we didn't see it again, though a few of us did hear it calling.

Heading back to the cars, we saw 4 Snow Buntings flitting around and heard a couple of Redpolls flying over. To continue the winter bird theme, we'd picked up a few Bohemian Waxwings a bit earlier and Pine Grosbeaks while driving.

We left Long Lake and headed towards Newbrook and some classic Cromie owling country. We ran the Windy Road, went down to Big Plunge Hole Road, and continued towards Many Owl Corner (MOC), some of Ray's favourite roads that he'd given distinctive names. We picked up a few more hawks, but no owls yet. The first pass at MOC was owl-less, but a mile or so to the south someone in the last car spotted a Hawk Owl.

After I tore all the photographers away from that owl, we continued on a search for Great Grays. Went back to MOC and took runs down Renaissance, Erdman's, and Gravel Pit Roads. Still nothing. Stopped back at MOC, and we all got out and scanned around. Eventually we started hearing a few hoots on the north side of the road, and soon there were more hoots on the south side. We could clearly hear a pair of Great Grays, but seeing them was different story. Finally Alf Scott got most of



Long Lake



Northern Hawk Owl, Photo by Sean Evans

the group on the birds. Great job of spotting – they were tucked pretty deep in the bush.

By this time it was almost dark and time to head back. I think Ray would've been proud of the excellent spotters who came up with 3 species of owl under less than ideal conditions (it's usually easier to find owls when it's colder and there's a lot of snow).

Big thanks to all the participants, especially to Sean Evans for his organizational work and to Connor Charchuk for eBirding.

Gerald Romanchuk

Photos by Gerald Romanchuk unless otherwise indicated

The bird was pretty popular.



The paparazzi got busy; they seem bashful when they get caught.



Cross Lake, October 15, 2016

Twelve of the keenest of the keen, the hardest of the hardy, the most foolish... (maybe I won't finish that) ventured up to Cross Lake on Saturday. With all the snow and travel advisories on Friday there was concern that we might have to cancel the trip, but most of the roads were decent.

We took side roads north of Hwy 37, mostly paralleling Hwy 1. It was very birdy most of the way, and it took over 5 hours to get to the lake. A slight detour over to the west side of Egg Lake was productive. Among one of many waves of American Tree Sparrows, an Orange-crowned Warbler appeared. It probably wasn't really that late in the year for an Orange-crowned, but with all the snow a warbler did seem out of place. That became a theme for the day – birds that seemed out of place, or at least out of time.

We saw several Rough-legged Hawks in the Egg Lake area, and quite a few throughout the day, plus Harriers and Red-tailed and Harlan's Hawks. Some participants saw a Short-eared Owl over the lake. While scoping out a distant hawk, we saw a Great Blue Heron cruising over the fields. Again, though it probably wasn't really that late in the season, it seemed odd in the snowy landscape.

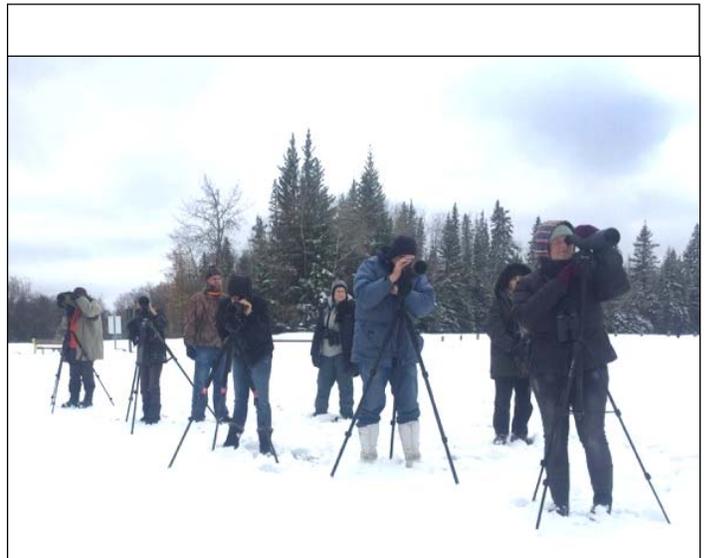
North of Legal, while looking at yet another wave of Tree Sparrows and Juncos, we saw 3 Meadowlarks on a wire. When we got out to look those bright yellow birds, we saw a Golden Eagle fly past.

Western Meadowlark



As we pulled up to Hwy18 a long and pointy-winged bird landed on the wet highway. Yet another surprise, it was an American Golden Plover. We were all glad to see the bird survive two close encounters with vehicles and finally leave the busy road.

Continuing north through the seemingly continuous waves of Tree Sparrows and Rough-legged Hawks, we stopped to look at a Merlin. One sparrow sat up on a distant fence post and warbled an odd song. Using the scope, we identified it as a Song Sparrow but no one recognized its song! How many



other species did we miss in those waves of sparrows? We finally made it to Cross Lake and scoped the lake.

After we saw lots of waterfowl – Common Loon, Red-necked Grebe, Bufflehead, Goldeneye, Mergansers, etc. – it was time for a birdless death-march down the George's Point Trail. We did see quite a few bird tracks in the campground, and soon saw their maker, a Ruffed Grouse.



We also picked up the expected winter boreal birds: Gray Jay, Boreal Chickadee, Brown Creeper. After we saw a pair of Three-toed Woodpeckers we were allowed to turn back. We almost made it to the cars when Sean claimed he saw a thrush, so we started chasing after a small bird that never let anyone get a really good look. After quite a bit of back-tracking we finally got decent looks at a Swainson's Thrush, another bird I wouldn't have expected. Turned out to be 4 or 5 thrushes. Wonder if there was another species there?



American Robin

By the time we got back to the cars it was after 5:00. We took a few side roads south of the park, hoping for owls, but we came up empty until we got back on Hwy 801 and started heading south. Our last bird of the day was a Hawk Owl perched in nice late-day golden light.



Northern Hawkowl

The digi-scopers were happy.



It turned out to be a really great day – pleasant weather, lots of birds, several surprises, and no one got stuck!

Gerald Romanchuk

Photos by Gerald Romanchuk

Lake Wabamun, October 22, 2016

Despite a cool start, Saturday was a beautiful fall day and a group of us birded the area around Lake Wabamun. We started at the provincial park, and then moved to the dock in the town-site, the lakeshore by the Ironhead Golf Course south of Kapasiwin, Sundance, the Keephills Cooling Pond, and, finally, Genesee Lake. We found 45 species altogether, with the highlight being 2 Pacific Loons at Genesee, one of which was still in full summer plumage.

Martin Sharp



*Pacific Loon,
Photo by Gerald Romanchuk*

Coal Lake and Bittern Lake Areas, October 1, 2016

Six of us braved less than clement weather to bird the area around Coal Lake and Bittern Lake (SE of Edmonton, NW of Camrose) and had a surprisingly good day, with 59 species seen.

Large numbers of southbound cranes, geese, and ducks provided a great spectacle south of Bittern Lake, and we saw a good variety of hawks and some nice surprises such as Harris’s Sparrow, Rusty Blackbird, and Western Meadowlark along with good numbers of American Pipit and Lapland Longspur. We also had an enigma – 2 small gulls were consorting with a Bonaparte’s Gull and Forster’s tern at the north end of Coal Lake. Both were clearly smaller than the Bonaparte’s Gull, with a buoyant tern-like flight, but clearly were gulls, not terns. This really only leaves Little Gull as a likely ID, but some hadn’t been able to see the plumage clearly enough to be sure (we were on the other side of the lake).

Martin Sharp

Rock Lake, September 25, 2016

Seventeen people participated in the trip to Rock Lake NW of Hinton, though we had 20 when we stopped at the second meeting point and met Bill and his wife Sally and daughter Jane, who briefly joined us thinking we were the fishing trip they were supposed to be meeting there. Thanks, Emily, for getting the radio back the next week!

This was an ambitious trip; 750 km return is a lot for a single day, but it was structured to explore a new area for many of us. For the last few years we have been doing fall trips to the west/northwest and it's been great to get to know Obed Lake PP (always a fixture) and various other Hwy 16 side-trips. Some years we've gone southwest to Robb, Cadomin, and Cardinal Divide, south to Minnow and Wolf Lakes, north to Chip Lake, and northwest to Switzer PP, Brule, and more.

This year the trip itinerary started with a stop at Isle Lake, the first of the traditional stops looking for fall migrants. There are so many potential stops at this lake and we've done a few of them over the years, but the Municipal Park at Township Rd 534 is a great place to get in and out of when a long day ahead is planned. Nice mix of waterfowl, the most noticeable of which were 50 Ring-necked Ducks and some late Pied-billed Grebes.

Next up was a pleasant short hike at Pembina River PP (Entwhistle) hoping to see if the resident Peregrine pair were still about (not that we could see) or any of the hack-site release birds (this river-cliff site is used for fledging out young Peregrines). The hike was notable for 10 Evening Grosbeaks, and we were able to get a scope on great views of a lifer for some of the attendees. We seem to encounter these birds in the small towns along Hwy 16, as they were noted at Wildwood in the past too.

Next birding stop was Obed Lake PP. The lake was glassy smooth but without a huge variety of species. Surf Scoter were present, pretty much a lock this time of year there, and after some brief excitement turning a couple of them into Black Scoter they turned their heads from their all-too-common tucked-in position and were seen to be Surf. We are starting to learn our lesson with fall Common Loons and did not attempt to turn those into other loon species. I think the other factor is a plethora of better spotting scopes in the club nowadays that enable us to see field marks better.

Next up was the longish drive into Rock Lake, new territory for most of us, and of interest because it abuts Jasper National Park. (Apparently there is a 4-day hiking trail from here to Jasper.) Weather was a factor, with high Rocky Mountain winds minimizing sittings and carrying on the ENC tradition of choosing the windiest spot for the lunch break, but we did have some fun with Gray Jays and enjoyed the views at the lake itself.

The last birding stop was Gregg Lake in Switzer PP, where we saw a gigantic bull moose in full regalia and nice views of Hooded Merganser and Surf Scoter. For me the west continues to beckon, still many areas to explore, and I hope to try some of these spots out in winter to see how the finch crop is out there!

We saw 39 species, not counting species seen enroute. Swainson's Hawk, American Crow, and Red-tailed Hawk were seen several times but not recorded from any of our stops along the way.

Steve Knight

The Grey jays opening and eating some sort of caterpillar (?) were fun.



Photos above by Gerald Romanchuk



Rock Lake field trip, Photo by Gerry Fox

Elk Island, September 10, 2016

The ENC fall birding trip to Elk Island attracted 19 participants. It was a cool morning that got worse as we went up the parkway. The wind kicked up and a rain shower hit. Luckily, the rain blew over quickly, but we experienced windy conditions all day.

At the ponds near the Moss Lake trailhead we were looking through brown ducks and watching robins and yellow-rumps fly over when we spotted a Rusty Blackbird, first of the fall for most of us.



Photo by Steve Knight

We hiked the Sandhills Trail. Most of the people didn't share my excitement in catching a Saffron-winged Meadowhawk.



Saffron-winged Meadowhawk, Photo by Jana Sneeep

On the trail we got a great look at an adult Frog Hawk (a.k.a. Broad-winged Hawk) as it circled above. A bit more surprising was an Osprey cruising over. Since none of the lakes in the park have large fish, Osprey are uncommon there.

On the way back we hit a few mixed flocks of songbirds. It's always fun to try and get a look at the quickly moving birds.

After checking 5 or 6 of those chickadee-led flocks we ended up with a decent 9 species of warblers; Orange-crowned, Tennessee, Yellow, Magnolia, Yellow-rumped, Palm, Bay-breasted, Redstart, and Mourning.



Palm Warbler, Photo by Jana Sneeep

Scoping Astatine Lake didn't produce a whole lot, but we did pick up 5 species of grebes. By late afternoon we were ready to find a spot to relax and have a campfire and wiener roast. But first the lists had to be looked after.



Brian, Sean, and Emily, Photo by Gerald Romanchuk

Thanks to Sean Evans for doing our eBirding, and Emily Gorda and Brian Stephens for going over the lists.

All in all, a good day with a great group and some nice birds!

Gerald Romanchuk

Field Trip Reports

Boisvert's GreenWoods, September 3, 2016

Nine of us headed up to the Edmonton and Area Land Trust property Boisvert's GreenWoods just north of Morinville. The weather was cool and windy, but we had no rain or fog. I had visited this site a couple of days before when it was very foggy and had high expectations for the number of species. However, this day was quiet and the birds that were there did not respond to pishing but kept out of sight and low to the ground. We began to think that somewhere in this forest a predator was lurking which kept them wary.

Still, we found 9 species and had excellent views of a Swainson's Thrush and lots of glimpses of White-throated Sparrows, Downy Woodpeckers, and White-breasted Nuthatches. Along the southern edge, the line of small conifers sheltered many largish nests, possibly Robins'.

We discussed options for the rest of the day and headed west along TWP 564 towards Sandy Lake. We saw many raptors and several mixed flocks of migrating sparrows (also keeping low out of the wind) and stopped at a pond to check out ducks and yellowlegs.

During a lunch break at Sandy Beach picnic area we had nice views of a Bald Eagle. Heading south to Devil's Lake (Imrie County Park) along a back road we saw a flock of Mountain Bluebirds along with several more raptors.

At Devil's Lake with Imrie County Park (just south of Hwy 37) several raptors were working the fields, including one very beautiful Red-tail that initially did not leave its perch. The county park has a network of trails and we had some discussion about the route to take. We opted for the trail that headed into the forest of black spruce, tamarack, and white spruce. Again we found things very quiet. The "proper" route led us to a junction where we saw cattails growing in the trail we were considering – a bit wetter than we expected. We took the straight-line trail from the edge of the campground towards the birding blind. At one of the junctions with other trails, we rather half-heartedly tried some pishing. Jackpot! First, Golden-crowned Kinglets came close and soon birds of various species were zipping all around us. Lots of Yellow-rumped Warblers, Black-capped and Boreal Chickadees, a finch which we couldn't decide on, and a Palm Warbler.

Down at the wonderful blind on the edge of the lake, we saw lots of Coots (31 or 40, depending on who was counting), Pied-billed Grebe, Horned Grebe (although we were tempted to create a new code, WIGR – i.e., winter grebe), Lesser Scaup, and Ring-necked Ducks close in. Just behind the blind we were treated to some White-throated Sparrows eating berries. Just as we were about to head back, we heard and then saw a number of Eastern Kingbirds.

Over the course of the day we had 45 identified species plus 2 "taxa" – ducks and a House/Purple Finch.

Thanks to Gerald for keeping the eBird lists.

Brian Stephens

Songbird Banding, Strathcona Science Park, plus Shorebirds in the Cooking Lake Area, August 28, 2016

Things sure didn't look promising this morning – the wind was howling and it looked like it could start pouring any second. When I got over to the meeting spot I was surprised to see that 17 folks actually showed up for the trip. We made our way over to the Strathcona Science Park for a visit to Janos Kovac's banding station. Janos and volunteers Jordan Lang, Toby-Ann Reimer, Art Hughes and Dave Ealey had already done their first net check and were processing some birds when we walked up.



It's always a treat to get a close-up look at the birds and watch the banders work out the age and sex of the birds and do all the measurements.



Photos by Gerald Romanchuk



The crew caught 16 birds while we were there, including several previously banded Chickadees, a Magnolia Warbler still hanging around after being banded 4 days earlier, and new Orange-crowned, Blackpoll, and Yellow-rumped Warblers, a Redstart, and Red-eyed Vireos.

Despite catching some nice birds under less than ideal conditions, Janos seemed to be most impressed by the chocolate cake Emily brought out! We do owe Janos and his volunteers a great big Thank You!!!

After a lunch break, our hardy band of birders was still keen to look for shorebirds. At the Lakeview access to Cooking Lake we saw hundreds of ducks and gulls and huge flocks of Avocets. Distant flocks of shorebirds were wheeling across the lake and a few peeps were close enough to ID. Most of us picked up our first Sanderlings of the fall.

We hit another access on the east end of the lake near the Golden Ranches property. Not many new birds, but a nice spot to check out.

From Cooking Lake we headed towards Kingman and the wetland where Buff-breasted Sandpiper was seen a few weeks earlier. Odds seemed very slim that it would still be there, but after looking through dozens and dozens of Yellowlegs, we saw at least 2 Buffies in the grassy wetland. It took a while, but we kept working on it and managed to get everyone a peek at the birds. It was pretty frustrating how you could finally spot the thing, but by the time you passed on the scope, the annoying little bleeper would have disappeared behind some grass.

We finished off with the always scintillating discussion about

the pattern on the tertials of a juvenile dowitcher. Despite the less than ideal weather we had a pretty good day!

Gerald Romanchuk

Photo by Gerald Romanchuk

Fall Warbler Walk in Hawrelak and Emily Murphy Parks, August 20, 2016

Twenty-six of us met at Hawrelak Park. We decided to divide the group, as so many participants would be difficult to manage on the hillside trails. Brian Stephens took half on a walk around Hawrelak Park while the rest of us walked the trail to Emily Murphy Park. It was slow at first, but we encountered a nice pocket of activity near the first stair landing on the Emily Murphy hillside trail.

We crossed paths with Brian's group on the way back to Hawrelak Park, where we did a circuit around part of the park and then the whole group met back at Picnic Site 1 to compare notes. It turned out to be a good way to go; with each group covering the same ground at a different time, each had unique birds to add to the compiled list.

Thanks for all of the keen ears and eyes out there, and a special thanks to Brian for stepping up to lead and keeping the list for his group.

We recorded 40 species, recorded including 10 warblers.

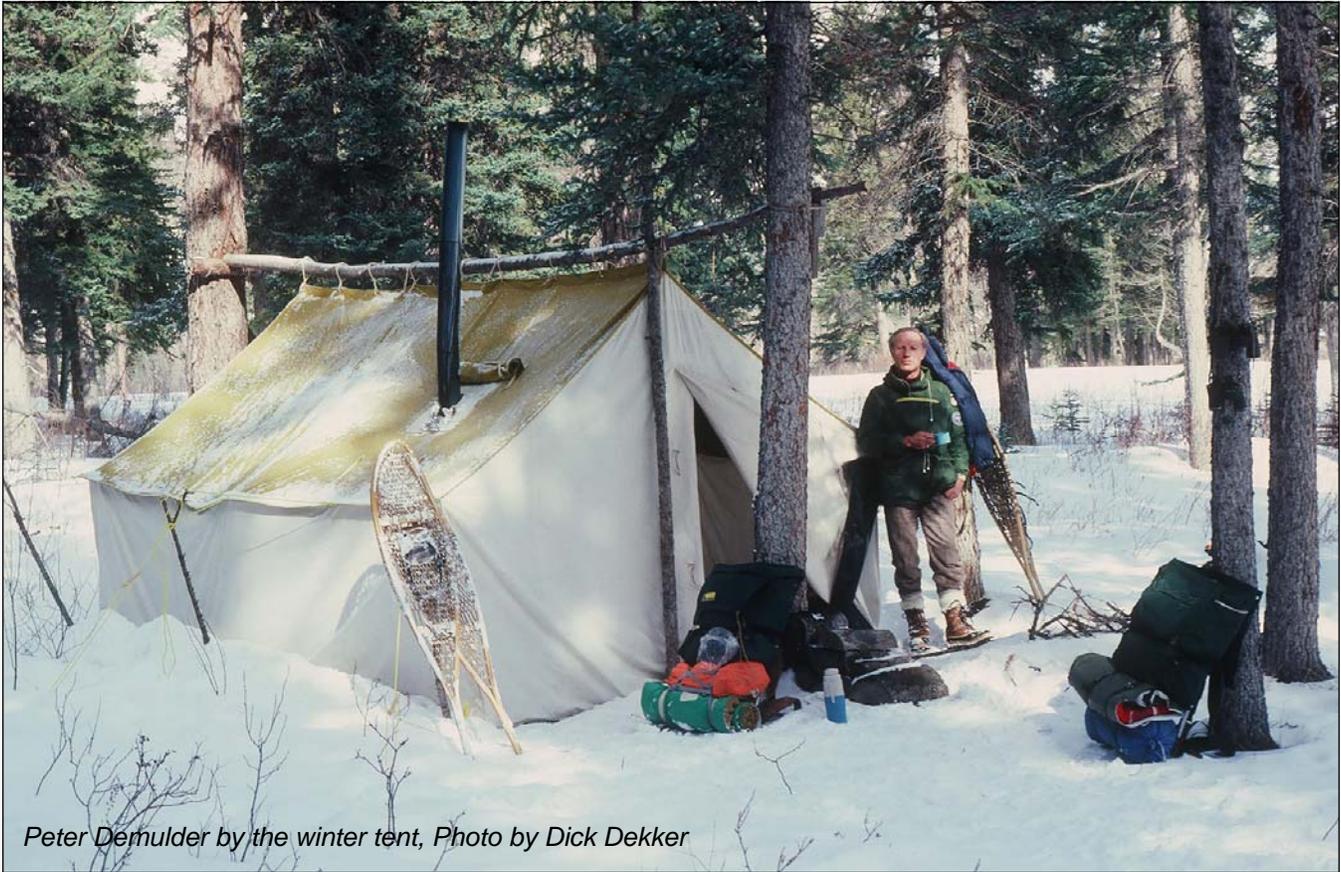
Don Delaney

Mister Intrepid

Memories of Peter Demulder, who passed away on December 2, 2016, at the age of 87 years.

Peter and I first met in 1964 at Beaverhills Lake on a pleasant fall day when the Edmonton Bird Club was there on a field excursion. Upon learning that Irma and I were new immigrants from Holland, prominent club member Joan Lister kindly introduced us to Peter Demulder, who was from Belgium and would be able to talk to us in our native tongue. There was little need for Dutch, though, because Peter had

attended every meeting and field trip, always happy to talk to newcomers about birds. Between the demands of a busy job and raising a young family, Peter had little opportunity to indulge in his passion for wilderness. At some point during the 1970s, when we again happened to meet at Beaverhills Lake, I asked him about his outdoor pursuits. He had made the usual family visits to the national parks to see the sights, he said, but he had never been in the backcountry. When I suggested we go there together, he jumped at the chance. A



Peter Demulder by the winter tent, Photo by Dick Dekker

forgotten most of his Flemish-Dutch and he, as well as we, were fluent in English. Peter had spent much of his youth in Britain because his father, who ran a passenger ferry between Belgium and England, had escaped across the channel from German-occupied Europe.

It turned out that Peter and his wife Deirdre immigrated to Canada in the same year as Irma and I. For him and for me, it was actually the second time that we had made the big move. Both of us had spent a few try-out years in Canada in the late 1950s, and, as it turned out, our common motive had been to experience the northern wilderness. In search of unspoiled nature and wildlife, both of us had driven the long and dusty road to Alaska.

In ensuing years, Peter became a long-term member of the Edmonton Bird Club and the Edmonton Nature Club. He

few days later he had purchased a pup tent, a down sleeping bag, and a rucksack, all of the best quality.

On our first camping trip, we hiked to the Snake Indian River in the remote northwest corner of Jasper National Park. After a frosty October night, the morning was clear and calm, and while we were making breakfast on an open fire, a wolf howled far away. It set the stage for further exploits. In search of wolves, I had hiked into this part of the park on numerous occasions since the mid 1960s, mostly alone. When I told Peter about the fabled alpine country to the northwest, in the Willmore Wilderness, he was keen to go there together.

We entered the park via the ancient Indian Trail starting at Rock Lake and ascending the valley of the Wildhay River. The trail was periodically patrolled by Alberta forestry

rangers, driving trucks. We thought of using bicycles and Peter lent me his daughter's bike. We probably became the first mountain bikers ever in the province. Staying overnight in forestry cabins, we crossed over Eagle's Nest Pass and got as far as the Berland River.

After a very rainy trip, when we were forced to drag our bikes through a creek to clean the mud-plugged wheels, we decided to forget about the problems of summer. Winter was our season of choice. By the 1980s, wolves had begun denning along the lower Athabasca River in Jasper Park. On the west side of the wide valley, there was an abandoned warden station which became a convenient base for our investigations. From there, over many years, we made cross-country hikes to remote muskegs, deep woods, and river canyons where I would never have ventured without Peter's company.

One November day, upon arriving at the station in the early afternoon, we were shocked to find that the rustic log house had burned down, its remnants still smouldering. Apparently, the century-old station had been terminated in the interest of erasing all signs of man's handiwork in the backcountry of the national park. Forced to bivouac that night under a big spruce tree, we discussed a new approach.

For a very long time I had dreamed of setting up a winter tent camp. I knew how to go about it, but if it weren't for Peter's immediate support, I might never have proceeded with the idea. A couple of days later, we met at his city lab around lunchtime, and an hour or so later we had purchased a heavy canvas tent and an airtight sheet metal stove. The tent was big enough to stand up in and came with an opening in the roof for a chimney pipe.

On a cold February day, after a fresh fall of snow, Peter parked his car on the side of the Yellowhead highway, and we loaded our camping gear and packsacks on his kid's wooden toboggan. Taking turns, we dragged the heavy sledge across frozen Jasper Lake and through the woods, one guy walking ahead on snowshoes to pack the trail. By the time we arrived on the spot we had selected as a suitable camp site, Peter exclaimed that he had never in his life been so tired. The day was short, though, and we got to work at once, clearing a patch of ground in the woods and cutting slender pine saplings for tent poles. Blocks of wood collected at the burned warden station were carried in as basic furniture, and our sleeping bags were spread on a thick mattress of fragrant spruce boughs.

Near dusk, we were ready for the big moment of lighting the stove. Within minutes, the temperature inside the tent reached well over twenty degrees. With no shortage of firewood and clean snow to melt for water, we were happy and comfortable. That night the temperature dropped to minus thirty degrees, but the morning was calm and clear, and we immensely enjoyed a brilliant winter day.

Upon leaving we dismantled the tent and cached it in the woods. At each subsequent arrival, over many winters, Peter

took great delight in setting up camp, always finding some way to increase our comfort. While there, we never saw another human being, and we had many encounters with wildlife, with grizzly bears, cougars, wolves, foxes, pine martens, bighorn sheep, and elk. Birds were scarce. Peter was always pleased to call in a Boreal Chickadee or spot a Black-backed Woodpecker.

As the raven flies, our camp was no more than 4 km or so from the main highway transecting Jasper Park, but vehicle access was restricted. By mid October, the narrow Celestine Road into the district was closed to the public and often blocked by drifting snow. To reach our camp site we had to canoe across the Athabasca River or wait until upstream Jasper Lake had frozen over. Both of these approaches could be hazardous. We had to navigate our way around open leads of water on the lake or dodge ice floes in the turbulent river. For extra support on lake ice I had devised a pair of "skis" consisting of long two-by-fours with a leather strap across the centre to hold our boots. Peter never waited to put on these awkward contraptions and just started walking, testing the ice with a stick and picking his way around open leads. All I had to do was follow his tracks. This is when I began calling him Mister Intrepid. Years later, looking back on our ice crossings, Peter shuddered at the risks we had run. The way I see it, we must have had a guardian angel perched on our shoulders in those days.

On two occasions, though, recognizing the critical condition of the rotting lake ice and extensive overflow, I refused to agree to his foolhardy crossing attempt and forced him, as he called it, "to follow orders." Walking the ten extra miles around the treacherous lake may well have saved our lives.

I am not quite sure when Peter and I stopped going out together on winter trips to the mountains. One day, after tracking the local wolf pack, we sat down in the late winter sun on the banks of a frozen beaver pond. I had just made a small fire of dry spruce twigs to melt a pot of snow for tea, a ritual Peter loved, when he suddenly placed a hand on his chest and said, "I am in trouble...."

Evidently, his heart problem was acting up. I quickly doused the fire and packed up to start the hike back. We silently threaded our way through the woods and across the hillsides, taking an hour or more to reach the warden cabin where we were staying for the night. Upon arriving, without a word and after having taken his nitro-glycerine medication, Peter retired to his bed, and I sat down to rekindle the stove. After a very long silence, he roused and I softly asked how he was doing. "I am all right," was all he said.

To this day, I still climb the same escarpment behind our former campsite. Scanning the vast scenery of mountains and river flats, I marvel at the memory of the many secluded beauty spots Peter and I used to visit, with me as the catalyst, and he as my ever cheerful companion.

Dick Dekker

Deirdre P. Demulder, March 16, 1930 – September 15, 2016

Pierre R. DeMulder, June 19, 1929 – December 2, 2016

Members of the Edmonton Nature Club were saddened by the recent loss of two of our most dedicated supporters. Long-time members Deirdre and Peter had been married for 63 years when they died within three months of each other this fall.

Deirdre Demulder was born north of London, England, and Pierre DeMulder was born in Ostend, Belgium. (Pierre DeMulder was usually known as Peter Demulder during his time in Edmonton.) Peter was evacuated to England in 1940 and spent the war years near Okehamp-ton in Devon before returning to Belgium. He subsequently trained in medical sciences in England, where he met Deirdre, and they married in 1953. They came to Edmonton in 1964 and in 1968 moved into the house they occupied in the Grandin neighbourhood of St. Albert until their recent passing.

Peter and Deirdre were members of the Edmonton Nature Club and its predecessor clubs, the Edmonton Bird Club and Edmonton Natural History Club, for over 50 years. They had an important role in the early days of the Wagner Natural Area Society and Clifford E. Lee Sanctuary, and Peter also played a part in establishing the Beaverhill Bird Observatory and the Big Lake Environmental Support Society (BLESS). For many years they were regulars on field trips, mostly to Beaverhills Lake; their companions on these trips would be club luminaries such as Bob Lister, Robert Turner, Drs. George and Kay Ball, and Edgar T. Jones. Peter was a tour guide at the Snow Goose Festival (subsequently Snow Goose Chase) since the first event in April 1993. In describing the spectacle of thousands of Snow Geese migrating through the Beaverhills Lake area in mid-April, he amused, entertained, and informed hundreds of children. For many years Peter led a field trip (Snowy Owl Prowl) north and west of St. Albert in mid-February.

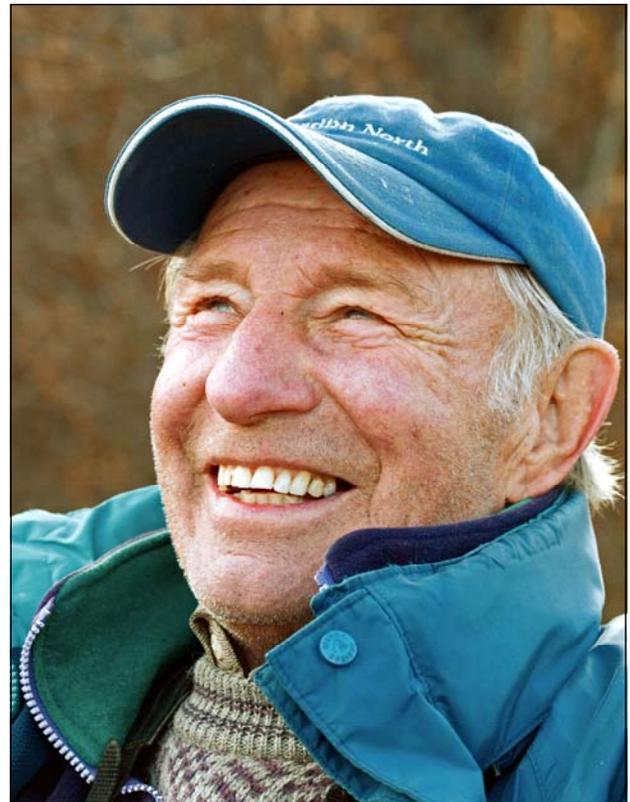
Peter was president of the Edmonton Bird Club in 1978. For a decade, he organized the Audubon Wildlife Film Series of very successful illustrated wildlife programs, each narrated by a visiting speaker/photographer. With Dick Dekker he persuaded Bob Lister to write *The birds and birders of Beaverhills Lake* and secured funding for its publication in 1979. In Dick's company he made many winter camping trips to study wildlife in the Jasper backcountry. Dick's book, *Wildlife Adventures in the Canadian West*, chronicles some of their adventures (and misadventures). (Please see page 28 for Dick's appreciation of "Mister Intrepid.")

Peter participated in Edmonton Christmas Bird Counts for 45 years, from 1965 until 2010. He started the

St. Albert Christmas Bird Count in 1991 and coordinated it for 12 years until the requirement for compilers to have computer data entry skills caused him to step down. His last St. Albert bird count was in December 2013, when he and Percy Zalasky, Jack DeHaas, and Hank Peters found 17 species, including a Snowy Owl, in Zone 3. He ran numerous breeding bird survey routes with Jack Park beginning in 1974, and in the early days he monitored a bluebird/swallow route of two hundred nest boxes and banded the fledglings with the assistance of his three children.

Peter and Deirdre were avid hikers and particularly enjoyed their trips to the mountains of Jasper and Banff, with Lake O'Hara a particularly well-liked destination reserved for special occasions. For many summers Deirdre joined the Skyline Hikers at their annual camps. They complemented each other well. They attended annual banquets and indoor meetings right up to their passing, and their company was much appreciated by fellow club members. Sincere condolences to their three children: Jill, Sally, and Bob.

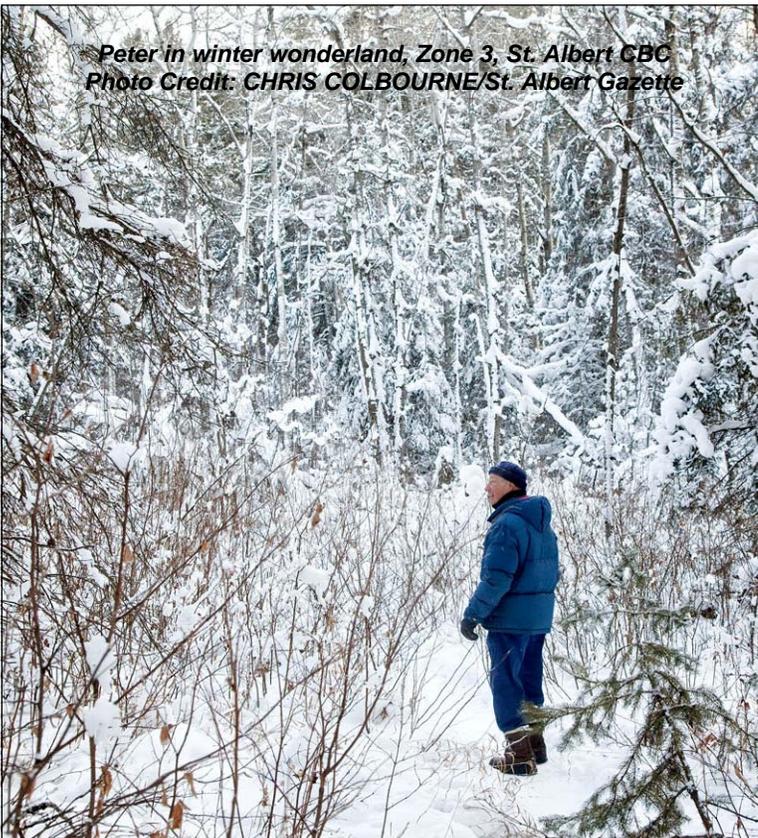
Alan Hingston



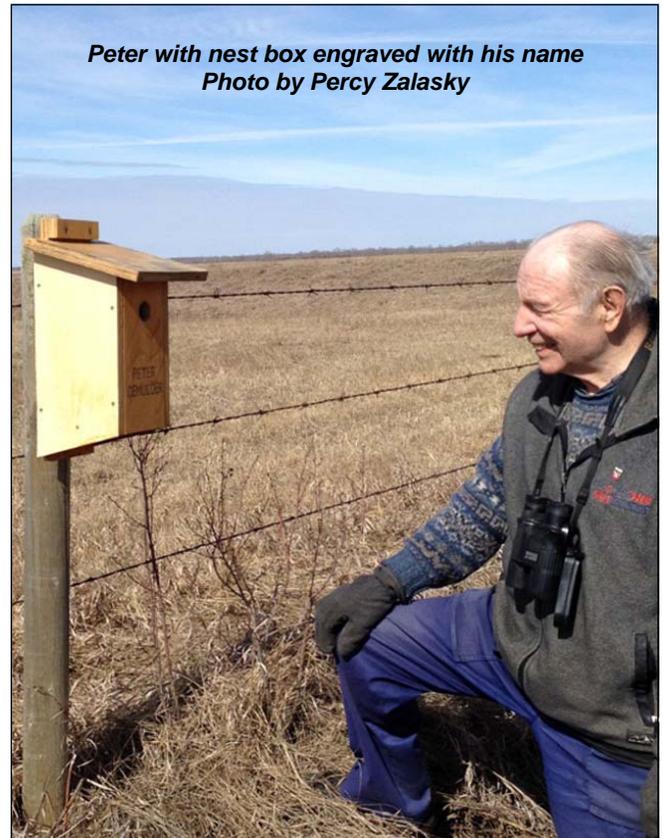
**Peter in Kananaskis looking for eagles,
Photo by Cliff Hansen**



Peter and Deirdre Demulder at the April 9, 2016, Annual Banquet, Photo by Steve Knight



*Peter in winter wonderland, Zone 3, St. Albert CBC
Photo Credit: CHRIS COLBOURNE/St. Albert Gazette*



*Peter with nest box engraved with his name
Photo by Percy Zalasky*

West Coast Pelagic Trip, September 18, 2016



Ted and Donna McKen



Martin Sharp



Karen Lindsay, Donna Bamber, Steve Knight, and Colleen Raymond



Photos by Gerald Romanchuk