

THE PARKLAND NATURALIST

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Kiggi the Gyrfalcon: Photo by Don Delaney (top), Photos by Gordon Court (bottom left), (bottom right), Wounded Kiggi (top right), Photo by Harald Henrich

Kiggi's Journey to Recovery

This is a story about the journey of a badly injured Gyrfalcon and her release back to the wild. It can be told because of the efforts of some dedicated people who came into her life, from the initial life-saving rescue to medical treatment, convalescent care, retraining, documentation, and eventual release. She became known as “Kiggi,” which is short for Kiggaviarjuk, the Inuktituk name for Gyrfalcon.

On April 1, 2016, licensed raptor bander Richard Chamberland was travelling to a job site when he noticed a raptor out in a field in southwest Edmonton. He always has his trapping and banding gear in his vehicle. He set a trap with live mice bait and waited. He said, “The falcon actually walked across the field to the trap, which is very unusual.”

Richard captured the injured Gyrfalcon and took her to his home. The following day he brought her to his office in Edmonton, where Dr. Gord Court picked her up.

Gord Court took her to WILDNorth (Wildlife Rehabilitation Society of Edmonton). An x-ray determined that she had no broken bones, but most likely suffered an avulsion injury to her right shoulder, probably caused by colliding with a wire fence or power line.

WILDNorth director Kim Blomme cleaned the wound and released Kiggi back to Gord Court, who cared for her in his home for several weeks. He provided the following information:

Initially, she was very dehydrated and refused food or drink. She was scrappy enough to bite on the end of a syringe, however, whenever it was brought up to her beak while she was on the perch. I took advantage of this to squirt lactated Ringer's Solution into her mouth whenever I could. After a couple of days, she took a mixture of quail blood and Ringer's and then small pieces of meat. Once she got going on that, she began eating like a champ.

Unfortunately, the wing continued to hang down, and I resigned myself to the conclusion that she would be going to a zoo – I began taming her down, and she even made a visit to the Wildbird General Store. Luckily for her, I couldn't find a zoo placement for her that spring and asked Phil and Helen Trefry to board her at their breeding facility until I could get her a placement. To make a long story short, several months later I went to the Trefrys to collect her. Not only had she put in a full moult, her wing appeared completely healed.

Gord asked Master Falconer Steve Schwartze to take Kiggi to the next step. The following text is taken from correspondence between Steve Schwartze and Gord Court.

Kiggi initially responded to indoor training when she reached about 1250 g. Moving outside required a drop to 1220 g, and her best response in the field was at 1200 g. Below 1200 g she was quite thin and was kept indoors overnight if temperatures dropped below -10°C as a precaution against anemia.

We lost quite a few days in the field due to volatile weather. Temperatures below -15°C , sustained winds over 35 km/h, or precipitation rendered the drone unusable. Despite this, on days when weather allowed, Kiggi slowly worked up to altitudes around 400–500 feet chasing the drone for her food reward. On the first day in the field, conversely, she could barely fly 50 feet before crashing into the ground, and could gain no elevation.

In early March I began to allow her weight to creep up each day in the hope of speeding up her muscle development. She subsequently lost interest in the drone and in me, and began self-hunting like any good wild Gyrfalcon should. On March 9th she would not allow me to recover her in the evening and spent the night in the Oldman River valley north of Lethbridge. I recovered her the following morning at dawn and decided that her condition had reached a level I could not improve on further. She was fed ad-lib and handled as little as possible from March 10th until release day, March 23rd.

She was not a particularly nice falcon to handle but a great prospect for rehabilitation, and I am glad to have put her through the process.

Kiggi was released back to the wild one week short of a year after being captured by Richard Chamberland. She ate a Pintail carcass offered to her by Steve Schwartz, and flew off.

The following people all played a role in Kiggi's story:

- Richard Chamberland, who spotted and captured her
- Kim Bloome, who cleaned her wound and prepped her for the first stages of rehabilitation
- Gord Court, who got her feeding and ready to be handled
- Phil and Helen Trefry, who boarded her at their breeding facility
- Steve Schwartz, who worked her back to natural hunting ability
- Harald Henrich, who documented the events during Kiggi's rehabilitation and eventual release and compiled much the information used for this story

Don Delaney

On the Cover: Gyrfalcon rescued by Richard Chamberland, Photo by Don Delaney

President's Report, Winter 2018



Our President, Ann Carter

Members enjoyed another interesting “indoor” season. Many thanks to program director **Alan Hingston** for seeking out speakers on a wide range of topics as well as assisting with scheduling and venue bookings. Thanks also go to our study group leaders: **Karen Lindsay** for Bird Studies, **Patsy Cotterill** and **Hubert Taube** for Plant Studies, and **Pat Dunn** for

the Bug and Spider Group. All of these programs will return in the fall. Given the record attendance at plant studies, the board will be reviewing that venue for next season.

Recent Club Highlights

- Attendance at our annual banquet pushed us to capacity. Happily, we found enough chairs to accommodate everyone for an evening that included great company, good food, and an engaging speaker. As the Sawmill kindly offered us the buffet dinner at last year's prices, we were able to hold the ticket price to \$50. Many members have been in touch to say they really enjoyed the event. Thanks to **Toby-Anne Reimer** and **Alan Hingston** for putting it all together.
- Congratulations to **Patsy Cotterill** (40 years of service!) and **John Jaworski**, who were recognized for their volunteer contributions to our club. Congratulations also go out to **Rocky Feroe**, recent recipient of the Chickadee award.

Supporting Nature Education

- We're excited to support **WILDNorth's** (formerly the Wildlife Rehabilitation Society of Edmonton) new **WILDEd** program (wildnorth.ca/wild-ed),

which educates young children and adults about the importance of wildlife in the community and how to live with our wild neighbours.

- ENC has once again been able to cover the costs for a participant in the Beaverhill Bird Observatory's **Geoff Holroyd Young Ornithologists' Workshop**, initiated in 2016. At least four ENC members, aged 15 to 18 years, have attended this program (beaverhillbirds.com/programs/young-ornithologist-workshop).

Supporting Conservation

- Thanks to the continuing generosity of club members, our **Endowment Fund** for Land Conservation and Stewardship is now about thirteen thousand dollars. This fund pays out an annual amount to Edmonton and Area Land Trust.

Communications

- Members may have noticed a change in our **monthly newsletter**; we are testing a new format. The first section will be your club news along with the link for access to a list of activities/events; the second section contains material for those of us still learning about nature in the Edmonton region. Gmail users, note that club communications may be in your “Promotions” folder, depending on your email settings.

Upcoming

- Our Annual General Meeting will be held in September. All members are invited to attend.

Our Partners

- Congratulations to **Edmonton and Area Land Trust** (ealt.ca), currently celebrating 10 years of successful land conservation in the Edmonton region. Ten properties have been conserved in ten years, and we are thrilled to hear that EALT expects to add another four properties this year!

Respectfully submitted by **Ann Carter**, President, ENC
Contact the executive at enc.inquiries@gmail.com.

Thank you to everyone who submitted articles and photos. Congratulations to the Award Winners (pages 6–7). A very enjoyable evening at our Annual Banquet – well organized, good food and excellent speaker. See page 30 for Toby-Anne's report and pages 31–32 for photos.

The deadline for submissions to the May–August issue is July 31, 2018. Please send submissions to colwelld@shaw.ca. Dawne Colwell, Editor

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Membership Rates for 2017/18

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Awards

Chickadee Award

The Edmonton Nature Club depends on its “unsung heroes,” those members who generously donate their time without receiving much recognition. Our Chickadee Award is given to acknowledge their quiet dedication.

For several years, **Raquel (Rocky) Feroe** was the club’s representative with the Edmonton and Area Land Trust (EALT). During that time, she attended board meetings for both the Edmonton Nature Club and EALT. Thank you, Rocky, we appreciate you!

The 2018 Robert Turner Appreciation Award

The Robert Turner Appreciation Award is presented to a club member who has shown exemplary support of the Edmonton Nature Club objectives in three distinct areas: creating, organizing, and leading, and has done so for at least five years. We thank **Elaine Mellor** for a fine nomination.

This year’s candidate has made a wide variety of contributions to ENC, volunteering with the Snow Goose Chase, managing the club’s audiovisual equipment, radios, and scopes, and participating on the club’s website design and build team.

This individual is a Christmas Bird Count zone co-captain, has assisted in leading birding field trips, has been a member of the Board for more than five years, and manages all the cash deposits for the club. Whether you know this behind-the-scenes person or not, the candidate knows all of you because this fine servant of the club has been the Membership Secretary since 2014.

We are honoured to present the 2018 Robert Turner Appreciation Award to John Jarworski.

Lynn Maki



Rocky (right) receives the Chickadee Award from Ann Carter (left), Photo by Gerald Romanchuk

Congratulations!



*John Jaworski (left) and Patsy Cotterill (above)
Photos by Steve Knight*

Patsy Cotterill

Recipient of the 2018 Great Gray Owl Outstanding Service Award

This award is given for many years of dedication and service to our Club. It's a relatively new award, given out only twice before, to Bob Parsons and Jim Lange. This year we are glad to present it to Patsy Cotterill, who has been active in the Club (and our precursor clubs) since 1981, almost 40 years.

It's a daunting task to do Patsy justice, as she has been involved in so many activities. Born and educated in England, she has a great command of the English language and many of us benefited (some may say, suffered) from her advice on spelling, grammar, and syntax, when preparing our reports.

Early on Patsy made a name of herself in the efforts to save Little Mountain Natural Area. Even though this campaign ultimately was unsuccessful (1999), the lessons learned have influenced the City's policies, planning, and decision-making. Patsy became involved in Edmonton's developing natural areas policy, both as a citizen and as a representative of the Edmonton Natural History Club, undertaking site visits to candidate natural areas with other naturalists and advocating to City Council for the retention of tableland natural areas and an effective model for acquiring and managing them.

Along with Pat Wishart, Patsy served during the first 3-year term when the City's Natural Areas Advisory Committee was set up in 2003. One consequence was establishment of the Edmonton Naturalization Group (which became the Edmonton Native Plant Group and now the Edmonton Native Plant Society). Patsy was on the governing bodies of all these groups. She helped to obtain a lease for the Old Man Creek Nursery in NE Edmonton, which promotes seed collection and the propagation of native plants. Patsy also participated in preparing the native-plant growing guide *Go Wild*, published by the ENHC in 2004.

Patsy is involved in conservation activities at Whitemud Tufa Springs, Shooting Star Hill, Hodgson Wetland, Wagner Natural Area, Nisku, and Fort Saskatchewan Prairie. She has been the secretary and newsletter editor for the Wagner NA for more than 20 years. Saving and protecting the Gibbons Badlands was a remarkable success, as was rescuing native plants from the McLeod farm near Gibbons. As a result of the McLeod activity, many of us are now growing native specimens in our yards.

Patsy has organized and led many field trips in all directions from the City, including Nisku, Devon, Wagner, and Halfmoon Lake. She follows wherever interesting

plants may lead her: no bush too thick, no hill too steep, no swamp too deep. On occasion this has led her astray; I remember a few anxious hours after a trip to the Redwater Natural Area.

More seriously, on these trips she never gets tired of answering even the simplest of simple questions, repeatedly, including those from me. This year I'm resolving to learn the differences between Timothy grass, rocky mountain fescue, and smooth brome.

Patsy has led many conservation campaigns supported by the ENC, such as the alignment of the multi-use trail in Oleskiw Park and interpretive signage in Whitemud Creek Nature Reserve.

I mentioned her writing prowess earlier – most past or current Edmonton area naturalist magazines, including *The Parkland Naturalist*, have included one or two articles by Patsy. She also contributed to *Nature Walks and Sunday Drives 'round Edmonton*, published by the Edmonton Natural History Club in 1996, and *Coyotes Still Sing in My Valley*, a natural history of the Edmonton area published in 2006 after the Urban Conservation Conference sponsored by the ENHC in 2001.

Patsy was a director of the ENHC/ENC in the early 2000s and has coordinated the Edmonton Plant Study in its various incarnations since 1991, making arrangements for most of its six or seven yearly meetings. For years, she was involved in planning our Monthly Speaker events and has herself been the speaker at several of these sessions. Her plant identification course, to be held in May and September this year, has been enthusiastically received and is already oversubscribed.

Patsy was awarded the 1995 ENHC Volunteer Appreciation Award and the 2011 ENC Edgar T. Jones Conservation Award.

Even though her main interest is botany, Patsy does not neglect the birds. She has participated in the Christmas Bird Count for more than 10 years and has been the co-captain for zone 10 feeder watchers.

At present I'm reading a biography of Alexander von Humboldt, a German explorer and botanist from the early 1800s. He was forever collecting specimens, describing them, writing letters and books, coaching, teaching, lecturing, and advocating for worthwhile causes. This reminds me of somebody I know, local and contemporary.

We are immensely fortunate and grateful to have had Patsy on the executive, as committee chair, and working behind the scenes for so many years.

Herbert Taube

Conservation Corner

Battling Invasive Species and Human Attitudes

In the July 2017 issue of *PN* I referred to a blog by the name of Million Trees, based in San Francisco, California. This blog promulgates propaganda against invasion biology and its practitioners, denying that invasive organisms cause harm and dismissing claims that they are responsible for the extinction of fishes, birds, and mammals or depletion of their populations. Promoters of conservation and restoration of native species and communities are denigrated with the term *nativists*; indeed, for their efforts to safeguard native organisms against an influx of provenly destructive aliens they are likened to xenophobes or even racists of Nazi proportions! I get the Million Trees posts and have been worried about the influence of such blogs, wondering whether they are having an impact on popular ideology. Looking at the supportive, often congratulatory comments below the posts there is clearly a popular following, but perhaps the followers are only the already converted.

Hence it was with interest, and in fact relief, that I recently read an article by Anthony Ricciardi and Rachel Ryan, ecologists working in the field of invasion science, entitled, “The exponential growth of invasive species denialism.” (I was directed to this paper by Delinda Ryerson, executive director of the Alberta Invasive Species Council.) Relief, because this paper confirmed my suspicions, which is bad, of course, but also good because it shows the phenomenon is being recognized and counter-attacks are therefore possible.

Denial implies a deliberate refusal to accept established facts. Ricciardi and Ryan liken invasive species denialism to denialism of climate science and medical science (especially public health policies), and point to the similarity of the tactics used to discredit all three areas of science. The authors analyzed a raft of articles from scientific journals and Western media between 1994 and 2016 and identified a rising trend of invasive species denialism. (They mention internet blogs, including Million Trees, as major purveyors of science denialism, but did not investigate them as part of their research.) They state, “In the subdiscipline of ecology concerned with biological invasions, however, mainstream views are being increasingly challenged through a different form of discourse; more ideological than scientific, based on contrasting values rather than on facts, and expressed largely through popular media. It involves lay people, scholars in the social sciences and humanities, and a small minority of ecologists who downplay or deny the risks posed by non-native species.” Ricciardi and Ryan make the distinction between genuine scientific disagreement and debate, and ideologically-based denialism.

The authors also speculate on the motives of the denialists, as follows: “free-market ideology opposing increased regulations on transport and trade in organisms, distrust of scientific institutions in a ‘post-truth’ society, and differing val-

ues and perceptions of nature.” From my own experience I might add two other motives. One is a fear of pesticides, which are linked to human and environmental health problems, and another a moral distaste for killing living things, whether they be plants or animals. Given a slow evolution towards a more altruistic morality according the right to life to all (or most) living organisms, the last is a difficult argument to counter for the biologist or natural historian. It can be simply expressed as, should one kill one organism, innocently going about its biological business of surviving and reproducing, to save another? Particularly when a human is doing the killing, such decisions are likely to be uncomfortably based on values.

The authors are also critical of the media which practice “false equivalence” in giving equal weight (or print/air space) to informed (scientific) and less informed opinions. They conclude by identifying the real danger of a rise in denialism as being public opinion sufficiently influenced to impede policies to prevent, control, or mitigate the spread and impact of invasive species, and recommend that invasion biologists make more pervasive and persuasive efforts to convey their findings to the public.

There is evidence that climate and medical scientists are adopting similar tactics in response to assaults on their own disciplines, recognizing the importance of public opinion to decision-makers (politicians who themselves are unlikely to be scientists). It is unfortunate; the challenges to understanding nature that nature itself throws up are significant enough, without scientists having to battle challenges from their own species. I can’t help thinking that denialism is also a result of the inadequate teaching of the natural (especially biological) sciences in schools. A basic understanding of these sciences, apart from enormously enriching personal life, is essential in this Anthropocene era of climate change and human-caused extinctions. Of course, the details, the nuances, are important and are time-consuming for the layman to acquire, but with a basic knowledge these can be mastered as necessary.

Does any of this relate to the conservation debate that I described in a December article of the *PN*? As far as I can gather, this controversy between the “new conservationists” and the traditional ones seems to be more genuinely internal and scientific, although here again values play a dominant role. Since conservation, bringing endangered species back from the brink, and restoration of natural communities involve scarce resources of both money and land, it is inevitably a question of priorities, which are significantly influenced by values, and politics.

Where ecological and plant identification skills are lacking, zeal to remove non-natives can, perversely, be to the detriment of native plants. In a recent CBC interview (no doubt picked up by the media because of its sensational element) an employee of Calgary Zoo reported an infestation of inva-

sive common reed (actually a grass, *Phragmites australis*) at the zoo. The implication was that Albertans needed to be on the alert and that infestations found elsewhere should be destroyed. Unfortunately, the broadcast didn't emphasize an important detail: that most populations in Alberta will be the native variety, American common reed, subspecies *americanus*, which isn't invasive, provides good habitat for waterfowl, and should be left alone. The Calgary Zoo population is of the non-native European common reed, subspecies *australis*. The two subspecies can be distinguished upon examination, and I am informed by my colleagues with experience in Ontario, where European common reed is very invasive in wetlands and roadside ditches, that its robustness makes it immediately recognizable. (However, without a standard of comparison, the native common reed, which can reach more than 2 metres in height, can seem robust.)

I speculate that the example of the two subspecies of the common reed (native American common reed and non-native European common reed) could be used to highlight the differing attitudes of the traditional versus the “new conservationists” (and denialists). The facts are that European common reed is proving invasive in eastern Canada, swamping dominant native grasses, rushes, and other plants in wetlands, reducing biodiversity and habitat value for wildlife. Traditional conservationists lament the loss of native diversity and are also concerned that the American subspecies itself will disappear, either through hybridization with the closely related European subspecies, or by simply being outcompeted by it.

The “new conservationists” would likely see little wrong with this, and thus be unwilling to expend resources to control it. Their rationale would be: spread of European common reed (in fact, largely through human agency, such as ditch-digging) is natural, as human actions are part of the ecosystem; the hybrid would be a one-for-one replacement of the native subspecies so there would be no numeric loss of biodiversity; the European subspecies would eventually lose its aggressiveness, or be controlled by adaptive predators; and wildlife would adapt to use it, hence ameliorating its environmental impact (there is definitely some truth to this last). One wonders, however, whether its economic impact, for example, by clogging up irrigation canals in southern Alberta if it increases here, might make them change their minds!

American common reed (*Phragmites australis* subsp. *americanus*) can be distinguished from European common reed (subsp. *australis*) by its reddish-purple (vs. greenish-yellow) lower stems, and larger flower parts. Since European common reed is still very rare in Alberta but has the potential to be invasive, it is necessary to distinguish the subspecies, to avoid removal of the native subspecies and permit timely eradication of the invasive subspecies.

Patsy Cotterill



American common reed at Islet Lake, Strathcona Co., May 8, 2010



American common reed at Garner Lake, Sept. 19, 2014

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Million Trees blog. <https://milliontrees.me>

Indoor Meetings 2018

Alberta's Amphibians



Kris Kendell, our speaker for the February 16, 2018, meeting, has been a naturalist all his life, long before he became a professional biologist. He feels fortunate to have made his passion and interest in wildlife, particularly amphibians and reptiles, his career. For nearly twenty years, Kris has worked at the Alberta Conservation Association, where he focuses on citizen science, habitat stewardship, inventory and monitoring, translocation, and outreach initiatives that relate to amphibians and reptiles. Alberta is home to ten species of amphibians (frogs, toads, and salamanders) and nine species of reptiles (snakes, turtles, and lizards).

Amphibians are cold-blooded and have soft moist skins, while reptiles have scales or horny plates. Amphibians lay eggs and have the familiar two-stage life cycle. When they hatch from their eggs they are in gilled larval form (tadpoles); eventually they change (metamorphose) into the adult air-breathing form. Amphibians are important members of the ecosystem, as the adults eat insects while their eggs and larvae are important food sources for fish and birds.

Identification and Status

Of the ten species of amphibians in Alberta, three are “true” salamanders, three are “true” frogs, and three are “true” toads. The exception is the Boreal Chorus Frog, which belongs to the tree frog family, usually associated with tropical climates. Boreal Chorus Frogs do not “hop” like all other Alberta frogs and toads but clamber (monkey-like) through the vegetation. They are also noisy, making a trilling noise similar to running a finger along the teeth of a plastic comb.

Kris identified a number of features that differentiate the various amphibians. Typically, toads are chunky, short-legged, and warty, but to distinguish between species it is necessary to note the conspicuousness of the cranial crest. If it is fused, the species is a Canadian Toad; if it is absent, it is a Western Toad. Frog species are distinguished by their dorsal and lateral folds. Features such as colour and extent of mask can be quite variable and are not diagnostic. The location where they are found can help identify amphibians, as some occur only in very restricted areas of Alberta.

In Alberta, each amphibian species is assigned a status through population assessment, leading to designation as “secure,” “may be at risk,” “at risk,” or “sensitive.” This forms the basis for management action to prevent species becoming at risk or to enable species that are at risk to recover.

Status of Amphibians in Alberta

Secure	Tiger Salamander Boreal Chorus Frog Wood Frog
Sensitive	Long-toed Salamander Western Toad Columbian Spotted Frog
At Risk	Great Plains Toad Canadian Toad Plains Spadefoot Northern Leopard Frog



*Northern Leopard Frog,
Photo by Kris Kendell, Alberta
Conservation Association*

Conserving Amphibian Populations

There have been dramatic declines in population and distribution of amphibians, notably Canadian Toad and Northern Leopard Frog. Once common and widespread, these species have declined over most of their range, and not just within Alberta. Habitat loss is the greatest threat, and may be as a result of industrial, recreational, and transportation developments. Shallow water for spring breeding is particularly important to amphibians. This habitat is subject to annual

changes due to seasonal variations, short-term droughts, and longer-term climatic changes. Amphibians are less mobile than most creatures. They depend on micro-habitats for breeding and over-wintering and require corridors and connectivity to move from one habitat to another.

Many of the ephemeral (temporary) wetlands that fill following heavy rainfall or spring snowmelt are located on farmland. Wetland drainage for cropping and sloughs/ponds compromised by livestock watering are a particular concern, and a number of stewardship initiatives that farmers could take have been identified. Water bodies polluted by cattle can contain algae and snails that parasitize amphibians. These wetlands could be fenced and alternative cattle watering systems provided. Buffer zones along creeks can prevent cattle from trampling and polluting amphibian breeding areas, and squared-off fields can protect riparian areas while being more efficient for large machinery.

Amphibians are frequently found in back yards, particularly those that contain a garden pond. Allowing certain yard areas to remain wild and uncultivated and mown infrequently will assist amphibians. Window wells are dangerous for amphibians, which may fall in, become trapped, and die. This can be avoided by checking window wells often or installing clear plastic covers.

Monitoring and Inventory

The Alberta Volunteer Amphibian Monitoring Program (AVAMP) is a citizen science program that encourages people to report salamander, toad, and frog sightings. Observations may be seeing or hearing (often easier), and these sightings can be submitted online. They are used to map geographic distributions and changes in distribution, which is the first step in determining whether a species is at risk. However, amphibians can be difficult to detect and the number of capable or willing observers is fewer than for comparable bird, plant, or butterfly studies.

Three of the “at risk” amphibian species might correctly be termed “may be at risk,” as there is insufficient data to determine their geographic range and whether there have been significant changes. This limitation may be overcome by a new technique called environmental DNA analysis or “eDNA.” When amphibians visit water bodies to lay eggs and as their larvae develop, they leave DNA in the water. Although DNA is present only in minute quantities, modern molecular technology can analyze it from the water samples collected. The DNA sequences in the water can be matched to the library DNA sequences of different organisms to prove they were recently present in that water body. Environmental DNA may prove to be a better detection technique than AVAMP, given the limited number of observers. This technique may provide a method of assessing ranges and distributions and, by sequential testing, an estimate of abundance and changes of amphibian populations over time.

Alan Hingston



History of the Development of Edmonton and Area Land Trust

As far back as 1993, a report by Geowest Environmental Consultants expressed concerns over the loss of natural areas within the City of Edmonton. In 2000, two councilors who realized the importance of helping conserve natural areas within the city formed the Phair-Bolstad Committee. They were instrumental in initiating the Westworth report, dated 2001, which cited the same concerns about the loss of remaining natural areas within the city. Many groups within the Edmonton area worked with the Phair-Bolstad Committee to urge the city to protect natural areas. Both of the aforementioned reports stated the city should develop a land trust.

Role of a Conservation Land Trust

Discussions with various stakeholders identified a need for a mechanism that would provide flexible options for persons or organizations that wished to sell or donate land for conservation purposes. This would enable a quicker response to conservation opportunities and could also provide a vehicle for generating funds through partnering with different organizations. The reports noted that one approach that had proven successful in other areas was the establishment of a conservation land trust.

In 2002, after nine different inventories, policies, and reports, all saying the City of Edmonton needed to protect natural areas before they were lost to development, the city finally considered appointing a Natural Areas Coordinator.

In 2004 the Phair-Bolstad Committee urged City Council to move forward with a land trust and an Office of Natural Areas. The city finally approved this move and appointed a Natural Areas Coordinator. The Council wanted partnerships and community involvement to form a land trust and the Phair-Bolstad Committee identified key community stakeholders that might be interested in such a partnership. That is when Alan Bolstad invited the Edmonton Nature Club to become a partner. Marg Reine (president of the ENC at the time) encouraged the club to become a partner in the Edmonton and Area Land Trust (EALT). There were five other partners: the City of Edmonton, the Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF) that looks after EALT funds, the Urban Development Institute, the Land Stewardship Centre, and Legacy Lands Conservation Society. The six partners, with Alan Bolstad taking the lead, developed a preliminary business plan and each organization made individual presentations to Council for the establishment of a land trust.

ENC Presentation to Council Regarding Establishment of EALT

In a presentation to City Council in May 2006, Marg Reine said, “We [ENC] feel being a land trust partner fits with our organization’s objectives of partnering, education, and conservation. Our club feels that developing a land trust is in everyone’s interest to conserve rapidly disappearing landscapes, be they ecological, historical, archaeological, or geological. We bring a history of involvement in the Edmonton area, a membership interested in the outcomes of a land trust, and members who can and have contributed to the community regarding conservation and who would be willing to sit on a board for a land trust and work with them to bring a land trust to fruition.”

She concluded with this statement, “We [ENC] feel that the land trust should be locally driven and established. It is time to move forward with the land trust development so we can be documenting what is in the natural areas instead of documenting the demise of natural areas.”

Throughout 2005 and 2006, Marg Reine represented the ENC on a founding committee for the EALT at which the memorandum of association, articles of association, and business plan (2006–09) were drafted. In November 2005, ENC and other partners formally endorsed these documents. In May 2006 the City of Edmonton approved a \$2.5 million operational endowment for the EALT, to be held with the ECF. In 2007 the funds were placed with the Foundation to provide operational funding for the EALT.

In July 2007 the EALT development board advertised for an executive director. The successful candidate was Pam Wight, who still holds this position. Finally, in 2008 the EALT was officially registered as a charitable nonprofit “Part 9” company. It had taken thirteen years, from developing the concept in 1995 to receiving charitable status in 2008, to form the EALT.

Managing and Funding the EALT

In 2007 Coral Grove, the new ENC president, was qualified to be considered for membership in EALT for the three-year period. This person signs the AGM materials for the EALT on the club’s behalf. Marg Reine became the club representative, serving a three-year stint as secretary, followed by two terms as the chair of the EALT. Marg remained actively involved from 2004 to 2015 and currently is an advisor for EALT. Rocky Feroe replaced Marg as the ENC representative and, having recently

stepped down, has been replaced in turn by Hendrik Kruger.

More than half a dozen club members have set up personal or family endowments to support the EALT. The ENC made two donations initially and then recently set up an endowment; this is the best way to support the land

trust, as it allows money to be held in perpetuity with an annual payout to EALT. Anyone can donate to an endowment, even if it is set up as a personal or family fund. Donations are made to the ECF and designated to the specific endowment (for example, the EALT) that person wishes to support.

When Marg introduced Kory deGroot, Outreach Coordinator of the EALT and guest speaker at the ENC meeting on March 16, she noted the land trust was celebrating its tenth anniversary (2008–2018). Appropriately, as Kory noted in his presentation, the tenth EALT property was donated this year, by ENC club member Lu Carbyn, who was in the audience.

Marg Reine



Marg Reine at Pipestone Creek, September 2013

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Geowest Environmental Consultants Ltd. (1993), *Inventory of Environmentally Sensitive and Significant Natural Areas, City of Edmonton*.

Geowest Environmental Consultants Ltd. (1999), *Natural Areas in the City of Edmonton: Assessment of Conservation Value and Potential*.

Westworth Associates Environmental Ltd. (2001), *Conserving Edmonton's Natural Areas: A Framework for Conservation Planning in an Urban Landscape*.

Elke Blodgett



Elke Blodgett: Champion of Nature

Club members were saddened to learn of the death of Elke Blodgett on February 15, 2018. She was a passionate advocate for our natural environment, particularly around Big Lake and in St. Albert. Elke will be most remembered for her opposition to the proposal to build a western by-pass (now called Ray Gibbon Drive) through the wetlands at the east end of Big Lake. She started a group called the Anti-Bypass Coalition (ABC) and collected over ten thousand signatures in support of a request that transportation alternatives be investigated. She believed that the area should be protected in its natural state because of its value to the environmental health of Big Lake/Red Willow Park and to the quality of life of the citizens of St. Albert. The City ended up building the road; however, it was set back further from the lake than proposed in the original alignment.

Elke Blodgett
Photo supplied by BLESS

In addition, Elke made her opinions known on pesticide use and leachate from former landfills and sewage ponds entering the Sturgeon River. She also advocated for the removal or flagging of the power lines that cross the Sturgeon River at the outlet from Big Lake by the (now closed) viewing platform. On all these issues, Elke persisted with determination, devoting considerable time and energy to attending council meetings, speaking forcefully, writing letters, and making herself a “thorn in the side” of those who favoured development at the expense of the local environment.

Elke was awarded the 2010 ENC Conservation Award. A more complete appreciation of Elke can be found in the article by Patsy Cotterill published in the January–March 2012 *Parkland Naturalist*.

Alan Hingston

Indoor Meetings



and over the last 10 years. Whether it be through words of encouragement and advocacy, volunteering your time and energy, or through a financial contribution, we thank you! Our volunteer base has grown to over 700 people and we have conserved over 2,100 acres of land in the Edmonton region, which we couldn't have done without the steadfast support of the Edmonton Nature Club.

We were excited to announce the securing of our 10th Conservation Area earlier this year – The Lu Carbyn Nature Sanctuary, a beautiful area near Darwell, AB, with high biodiversity – especially for birders!

Working Together to Care for Nature

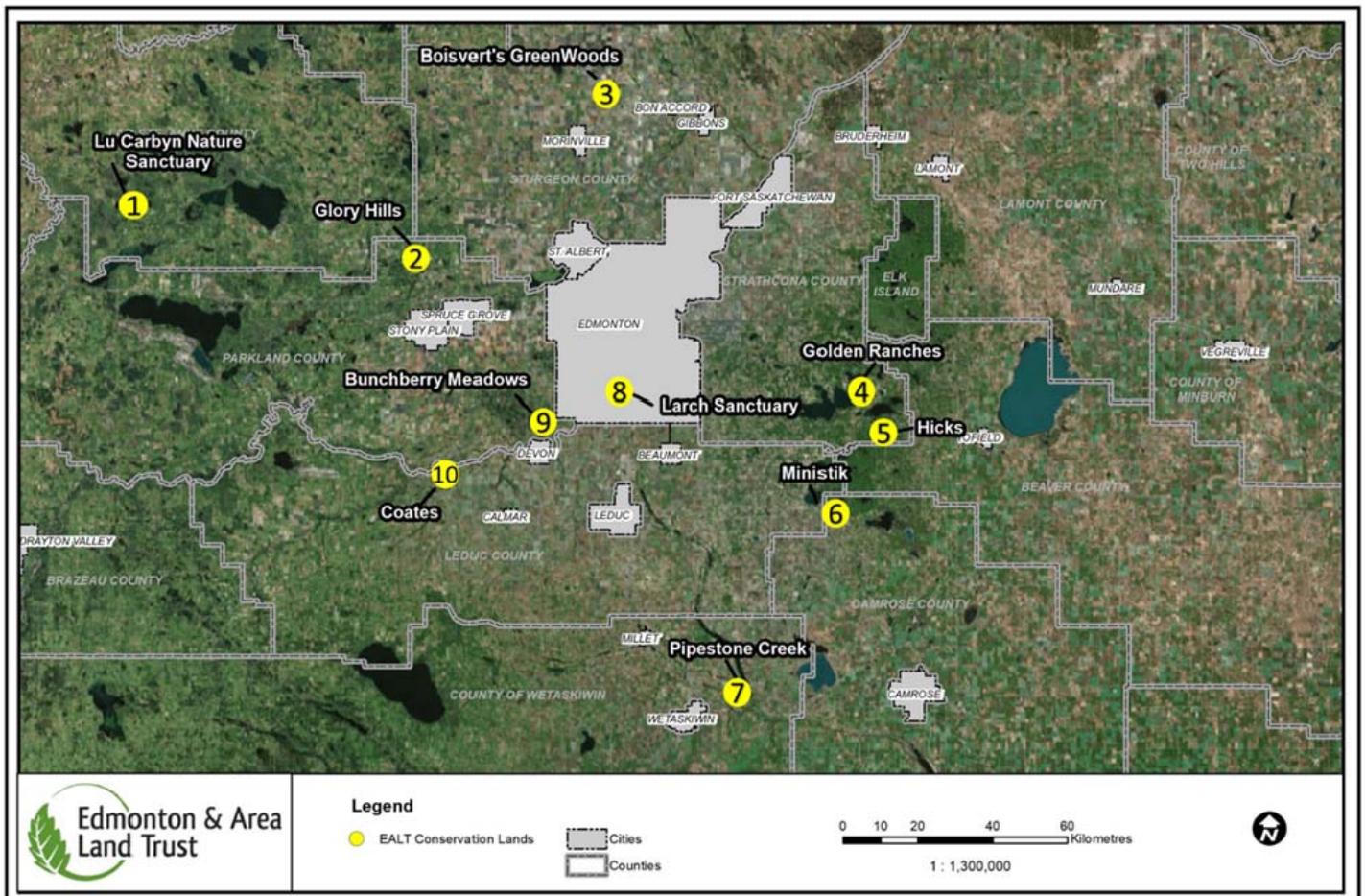
The following article was provided by **Kory deGroot**, Conservation Outreach Coordinator with the Edmonton and Area Land Trust, who was our featured speaker at the ENC meeting on Friday, March 16.

The Edmonton and Area Land Trust is celebrating 10 years of conservation this year! We want to extend a huge thank-you to everyone who supported us in 2017

How many conservation areas have you visited? We're planning to visit 10 of our conservation areas with volunteers this year and would love to have you join us. Stay up to date with all of our special 10th Anniversary events on our webpage, <https://www.ealt.ca/10th-anniversary/>. Here's a map of our current 10 Conservation Areas!

Kory deGroot

Map showing all 10 EALT Properties



Property	Location	Habitat	Highlight
1. Lu Carbyn Nature Sanctuary	Lac St. Anne County	Mix of forest and very productive wetlands	High biodiversity, especially great for birding
2. Glory Hills	Parkland County	Mix of forest, wetlands, shrub lands, and a lake	Trails around a lake and many bat boxes to observe. Cross-country skiing in winter
3. Boisvert’s Greenwoods	Sturgeon County	Old growth forest, surrounded by agricultural land	Easy to walk trails, with four geocaches and a wetland near a bat box
4. Golden Ranches	Strathcona County	Forest and open grassland	Located in the Beaver Hills UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, and has two geocaches
5. Hicks	Strathcona County	Aspen Parkland forest and several wetlands	Picnic area, trails along a wetland, and a bat box
6. Ministik	Camrose County	Wetlands, grasslands and forest	Located adjacent to the Ministik Bird Sanctuary
7. Pipestone Creek	Wetaskiwin County	Forest, grasslands slopes	Beautiful viewpoint of an oxbow lake, and self-guided tour available online
8. Larch Sanctuary	City of Edmonton	Biodiverse urban forest	Oxbow lake and self-guided tour online
9. Bunchberry Meadows	Parkland County	Forests, grasslands, and wetlands	Picnic area, interpretive signs, diverse trail system
10. Coates	Leduc County	Mixed woods and coniferous forest straddling a creek	Nestled along Willow Creek, evidence found of dinosaurs in the 1990s

Photos supplied by EALT

Larch Sanctuary



Lu Carbyn Nature Sanctuary



Chasing Birds: ENC Bird of the Year

The votes are in and the members have spoken. Drum roll, please...Northern Pygmy Owl has been chosen as our first Bird of the Year! We voted for five candidate birds that appeared on ENC field trips over the last year.

It was interesting to consider whether any of the other birds could overcome the universal appeal of an owl. And the little Pygmy Owl adds a certain hard-to-find factor as well. In fact, most of my early encounters with the tiny owls led me to come up with a "Pygmy Rule." You never find one where it was seen before. You can chase down as many sightings as you want, but they never stick around. To see one, you have to find it at a new spot.

One of the first Pygmy Owl encounters I remember on a club trip was in 2007 up near Chisholm on a Ray Cromie owling expedition. We had a large convoy of 10 vehicles and had just turned off the highway. Then a call came on the radio, "There's a small owl back here." It was from the folks in the tenth car! When the other nine vehicles finally got turned around, we all saw a little Pygmy Owl perched on the tip of a spruce tree. Of course, it's a bit embarrassing for the leaders to have driven past a bird like that. The only plausible explanation was that it must've flown there after we drove past!

Then in 2015, we were out with Ray again near Evansburg. A Pygmy was spotted at Elk Herd Corner. It was about 300 yards away across a clearing and wouldn't respond to Ray's attempt to lure it in for capture and banding. Someone suggested that heading across the clearing and getting closer might work. Ray handed me his net and a mouse and said, "Go for it." So I trudged across, struggling through the knee-deep snow, knowing I'd never hear the end of it if I came back owl-less. Luckily the owl came right in and was easily netted. I was out of breath by the time I got back, but I had an owl in the net!

The group of 20 or so people got to see Ray process and band the tiny owl. Seeing it in the hand really emphasizes just how small they are.

On another club trip in 2017 we drove past all the supposed good spots, and we headed back with a fair bit of quiet and some not-so-quiet disappointment. Several newer members hadn't seen a Pygmy yet. We were almost back to where we started when we slammed on the brakes for a small round lump on the tip of a spruce. Yes! Pygmy! The bird sat there for good scope views. Half an hour later we were finishing lunch a little further up the road and one of the guys asked, "What's that bird?" Another Pygmy conveniently flew up right above our lunch spot at Elk Herd Corner.

A few weeks later in 2017 we were running our owl marathon. It was just before lunch and we'd had a frustrating morning. Barred and Saw-whet Owls had been heard-only birds early on, then we dipped for several hours and nobody had actually seen an owl yet. A probable Pygmy was spotted, but when we stopped, it was gone. A few people thought they heard one, but the frustration just got worse. Finally, we went around a bend and saw a Pygmy in the classic "tip of a spruce" pose. And it cooperated nicely with the photographers.

We had a few nice Pygmy encounters this past year. Several members saw their lifer NOPO (Northern Pygmy Owl), and clearly a lot of members love the little guys. We've asked three of our artists in the club to prepare artwork. Emily Gorda, Jordan Lange, and Terri Susan Zurbrigg donated beautiful pieces that were given as door prizes at the banquet. We'll be using their artwork to help celebrate our Bird of the Year. Remember to think about candidates for next year!

Gerald Romanchuk



Northern Pygmy Owl



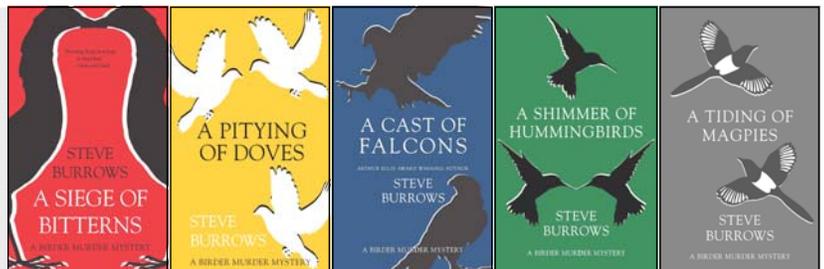
Northern Pygmy Owl, Photos by Gerald Romanchuk

The Armchair Naturalist

In this section, club members review books about natural history that they found particularly rewarding. Some of the recommended books may be borrowed from the Edmonton Public Library. To check their availability, go to epl.ca and click on “Search.”

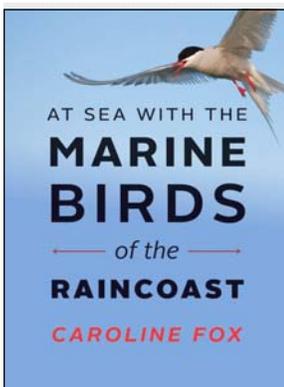
To suggest additional books of interest to our members, submit a brief review to **Karen Lindsay** via the ENC website, edmontonnatureclub.org. Click on “Birding,” “Bird Studies,” and “Contact” to send Karen your review.

Steve Burrows writes – wait for it – birder murder mysteries. There are five in the series so far, and they are very difficult to put down. The protagonist is a gifted detective who would rather be birding, and luckily for him the crimes he solves are all birding-related. These are my “go to” when I need a good book on vacation or otherwise – they are extremely well-written and amusing. Steve Burrows has pursued his birding hobbies on six continents. The first Birder Murder Mystery, *A Siege of Bitterns*, won the 2015 Arthur Ellis Award for Best Crime First Novel. (The Arthur Ellis Awards are Canadian literary awards presented annually by the Crime Writers of Canada.)



The Birder Murder Mysteries are *A Siege of Bitterns*, *A Pitying of Doves*, *A Cast of Falcons*, *A Shimmer of Hummingbirds*, and *a Tiding of Magpies* (publication date June 2018, you heard it here first!).

Recommended by Terri-Susan Zurbrigg, Janice Hurlburt, and Ann Carter



At Sea with the Marine Birds of the Raincoast provides a very interesting look at birds that use the BC coastline as their home or as a stopping-off point in their migration journey. Published in 2016, it is informative about marine birds from Sooty Shearwaters to Short-tailed and Black-footed Albatrosses, to Bald Eagles and Peregrine Falcons, plus gulls, murrelets, puffins, ducks and geese, and much, much more. It focuses on the BC coast adjacent to the Great Bear Rainforest and the waters between the northern tip of Vancouver Island and Haida Gwaii, including Queen Charlotte Sound and Hecate Strait. “This compelling read calls attention to the urgent conservation challenges faced by marine birds and their ecosystems, as well as their historically complex relationship with human society” (Google Books review). I found the book to be informative, exciting (yes, exciting) and just a darn good read!

Recommended by Bob McKim

A Short History of Nearly Everything

Considering the fast pace of new scientific discoveries, how relevant and interesting can a science book be that was written in 2003?

In a soft-cover tome of 544 pages published by Random House Canada, author Bill Bryson informs and fascinates the reader with research facts and insights ranging from the mind-boggling size of the universe to the equally astonishing mini-world of microbes and sub-atomic particles. The scope of *A Short History of Nearly Everything* is ambitious but never dull. Its strong point is that it presents a perspective on inventions we nowadays take for granted.

Who invented the thermometer?

During the 1980s and 1990s, when the late Peter Demulder and I made many winter trips into the backcountry of Jasper National Park, we often joked that the only figure we could watch out there was the thermome-

ter. Scraping the frost off the cabin's window pane on cold mornings, the first thing we checked was the outside temperature. Little did we know how long it had taken to come up with a useful little instrument like that.

The earliest thermometer was constructed over three hundred years ago, in 1717, by Daniel Gabriel Fahrenheit, a Dutch instrument maker. Its manufacture had been particularly challenging due to the difficulty of making a thin glass tube an even thickness throughout.

Fahrenheit gave his thermometer a wide, but seemingly haphazard, temperature range that set the freezing point of water at 32 degrees and its boiling point at 212.

A much more practical scale was calibrated in 1742 by Anders Celsius, a Swedish astronomer. Oddly, or so it seems to us now, he set the freezing point of water at 100 degrees Celsius and its boiling point at zero. It took a few years before that scale was reversed, so that water froze



The late Peter Demulder by a backcountry cabin in Jasper National Park. On cold winter mornings, the first thing we did was to check the outside temperature. (Photo by Theodore Dekker)

at zero and boiled at 100 degrees Celsius (at sea level, that is, because water reaches its boiling point earlier at higher altitudes).

Canada switched to the Celsius system in the 1970s during the liberal government of Pierre Trudeau. The Celsius thermometer is used by the majority of developed nations except the United States, which stuck with Fahrenheit, although the American scientific community long ago converted to metric, in weight and size as well as temperature.

Who discovered the cell?

The Englishman Robert Hooke, a contemporary of the illustrious Isaac Newton, was first to report on the existence of cells, which he called miniature bodies of matter. His simple microscope was the last word in optical instruments, with a magnification of 30 times. In a book published in 1665, Hooke calculated that a one-inch cube of cork contained 1,259,712,000 cells. In those days, figures in that order of magnitude were truly mind-blowing.

Just a decade later, in 1676, an unlettered linen draper from Holland presented images enlarged 275 times to the assembled members of the patrician London Royal Society. This Dutchman was Antoni van Leeuwenhoek, and his home-made instrument consisted of pieces of glass inserted in a wooden form. During his 50-year career Leeuwenhoek reported on the cell structure of a wide range of substances, varying from bread mould to excrement. He also reported that a single drop of water contained over eight million “little animals,” now called protozoa. In 1683, Antoni van Leeuwenhoek discovered bacteria.

Why aren't oceans getting saltier?

Oceans cover more than 75 percent of our planet but, as everyone knows, ocean water is too salty to drink. The salt and other minerals were brought in by rivers that have drained and eroded the land over millions of years. The accumulated load of silt transported by rivers ends up in the oceans. Heavier than fresh water, salt water sinks, with the saltiest water dropping all the way to the bottom.

As the sun warms the ocean's surface, the water evaporates and rises as vapour, leaving its load of salt behind and forming storm clouds over the land. The rain eventually flows back to the ocean, adding to its salt content. The big question for scientist has been why the oceans were not getting saltier over time, as one would expect.

The answer began to emerge after 1977, when oceanographers in the submersible Alvin descended seven kilometres or more down to the bottom of the ocean. There, they

came across deep-sea vents that were spewing hot water up from cracks in the sea floor. The explanation was that the ocean's salt water had percolated deep down into the earth's mantle, where it was super-heated and lost its mineral content. The water then found its way upward, to repeat the ever-lasting cycle. According to Bill Bryson, this was one of the most startling and revealing geophysical discoveries of the twentieth century.

Theodore (Dick) Dekker



On the way to the cabin and just before crossing the often treacherous ice of Jasper Lake, the author is leaning on Peter's snowshoes and his always very neatly packed rucksack. With a demanding job as the manager of a medical lab in the city, Peter planned our trips on short notice, no matter what the weather forecast might be. Upon arriving at the cabin, the first thing we did was hang the thermometer in good view of the window. Using my camera, this is probably the only photo Peter ever took. He never carried a camera of his own.

(Photo by Peter Demulder)

North American Birds Alberta Report

Part 1: Winter 2016/2017 (December–February)

Alberta NAB Team Members: Yousif Attia, James Fox, Milton Spitzer, Jason Straka, Michael Sveen

Advisors: Michael Harrison, Dr. Jocelyn Hudon

Weather

The weather this past winter was typical for the province. Milder weather in November allowed some larger water bodies to remain open later than usual, although a cold snap in December effectively closed many water bodies before the Christmas Bird Count (CBC). Snow cover was generally average throughout the province.

Rare and Notable Bird Records

A rather large lingering flock of 500 **Snow Geese** at Saunder's Reservoir near Medicine Hat was reported on 2 Dec (fide* MS), while six individuals were reported at Calgary on 18 Dec (EA). Two **Cackling Geese**, also from Calgary on 18 Dec (AH et al.), were the only ones reported. Other waterfowl highlights include one **Blue-winged Teal** at Tofield on 17 Dec (GH, JL), one **Northern Shoveler** at Hinton on 26 Dec (LT), and one **Ring-necked Duck** at Calgary on 18 Dec (AH).

One **Pied-billed Grebe** was at Calgary on 18 Dec (CH et al.), while another was at Wabamun Lake on 31 Dec (fide JF).

Two exceedingly late **Baird's Sandpipers** at Frank Lake on 3 Dec (PC, MM) may be a first winter record for this species in Alberta.

Mild temperatures in early December allowed a good number of Ring-billed Gulls to linger, with 70 at Calgary on 3 DEC (RW). Gulls were few and far between by the time the CBC season commenced, with one **Ring-billed** at Calgary on 18 Dec (NS) and one presumed **Franklin's** at Lethbridge (KN), the latter being one of the rarest species for the count period.

A first-cycle **Ferruginous Hawk** was outside Calgary on 22 Jan (LR) but it is uncertain whether this bird over-wintered. **Rough-legged Hawk** numbers were average compared to most years. **Gyrfalcons** were also observed in regular numbers, although one known individual at the Edmonton Grain Terminal was absent after re-occurring for several years.



Ferruginous Hawk,
Photo by Laurie Rutter



Western Screech-Owl
Photo by Diane Ramsey

A **Western Screech-Owl** persisted in the Calgary area throughout the period (B&DR). Numbers of other owl species seemed low compared to most years, although 11 **Northern Pygmy-Owls** at Cochrane Wildlife Reserve CBC on 29 Dec were notable (JP). The one exception was a bumper season of **Snowy Owls** found in Central Alberta.

A **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** was at Strathcona for the second winter in a row (ED, fide KG)

Perhaps the most notable winter bird in Alberta was a **White-winged Dove** photographed in Fort McMurray on 5 Dec (CG). The bird did not stick around, and represents just the third record for the province

A **Say's Phoebe** made a brief appearance at the Ellis Bird Farm near Lacombe on 17 and 18 Jan (EBF).



White-winged Dove, Photo by Christine Godwin



*Say's Phoebe,
Photo by Ellis Bird Farm*

Three wintering **Brown Thrashers** were found in Alberta over the winter. One successfully over-wintered at Canmore (ND), while a second was at Medicine Hat and last observed on 9 Dec (MS). A third **Brown Thrasher** found on 18 Dec in Airdrie (HL) persisted until the end of winter.

It seemed to be a successful year for overwintering **Harris's Sparrows** in Alberta, with birds reported at Nanton, Dinosaur PP, Fort McMurray, and Lethbridge. Wintering **White-throated Sparrows** seem to be on the rise, with 20 birds on the Edmonton CBC on Dec 18 (fide KB). **Snow Buntings** were detected in typical numbers during the CBC season, with the highest count coming from Innisfail, with 3000 on 18 Dec (fide JB).

Rusty Blackbirds were in typical small numbers, although a high count of 10 were at Cochrane Wildlife Reserve on 29 Dec (JP). Medicine Hat had three **Brewer's Blackbirds** on 18 Dec (fide MD), while three were at High River on 20 Dec (fide GW). Overwintering **Common Grackles** were reported at Beaverlodge, Cold Lake, Elnora, High River, and Fort McMurray. ****Red-winged Blackbirds** have become more regular in Alberta during winter in recent years, and may no longer be noteworthy winter records.**

It was not an especially “finchy” year, but healthy **Common Redpoll** totals numbering over 500 individuals came in from CBCs at Athabasca, Opal, and Wabamun Lake. A total of 24 **Hoary Redpolls** were reported from eight CBC circles. **Red-** and **White-winged Crossbill** numbers were noticeably low compared to irruption years in most parts of the province.

Aberrant Plumage Records

Two amelanistic **Pileated Woodpeckers** believed to be different individuals were observed over the winter. One bird was at Sherwood Park on 12 Jan (SK) and a second at Gibbons just north of Edmonton on 30 Jan (TH).



*Pileated Woodpecker,
Photo by Ted Hogg*



*Pileated Woodpeckers,
Photo by Shelly Koch*

Two partially leucistic **Black-capped Chickadees** were observed over the winter at Whitemud Ravine in Edmonton (WO). The birds were loosely associating with each other and had distinctly different patterns of leucism.

At least one leucistic **Black-billed Magpie** was at Police Point Park in Medicine Hat over the winter, possibly the same bird observed for the past several years.



Partially leucistic Black-capped Chickadees, Photos by Wayne Oakes

Observers

Enid Angelstad, Kim Blomme, Judy Boyd, Phil Cram, Neil Denton, Marty Drut, Edna Durand, John Folinsbee, Christine Godwin, Andrew Hart, Cedric Hitchon, Ted Hogg, Geoff Holroyd, Shelley Koch, Jeremy Lambe, Heinrich Lohmann, Mike Mulligan, Kayleigh Nielson, Wayne Oakes, Jamey Podlubny, Bob and Diane Ramsay, Laurie Rutter, Nimali Senviratne, Milton Spitzer, Laura Trout, Greg Wagner, Ellis Bird Farm,

Yousif Attia and James Fox

* **Note:** The designation “fide” means that the report came through a second person and wasn’t reported directly to a member of the Alberta North American Birds team.

Field Trip Reports

Hawrelak Park, April 10, 2018



Photo by Manna Parseyan

It felt like spring might finally be on its way, but the hoped-for open water on the ponds was not to be, so 12 of us headed along the trails. The highlight of the day was a Northern Shrike singing in the top of a spruce, and we all got a good look. We thought we heard a Tree Sparrow and couldn’t find it, but on the way back on the riverside trail a Tree Sparrow presented itself for most of the group to see. In the air and across the river, there were several gulls; a possible Herring Gull did not

materialize when the long-distance photos were examined on the computer screen. Two bunnies, two chipmunks, and several squirrels were spotted. No evidence of spring awakening was found on any of the trees and shrubs examined – maybe next week!



Northern Shrike, Photo by Ted Hogg



Chipmunk, Photo by Chris Rees

Chris Rees

Goldbar Park, March 27, 2018



Photo by Manna Parseyan

It was not a beautiful spring day, but eleven of us walked the river bank and hill trails in the snow. We reported 17 bird species in eBird; three of these were spring migrants. We also had a bird singing in a tree top across the parking lot, but it flew away before being identified when Alan Hingston drove over for a closer look. We stopped to check several trees and shrubs for spring wake-up activity: nada. For some of us the highlight was two Easter bunnies (a.k.a. snowshoe hares) feeding in the shrubbery along the river bank.



Poplar bud galls, Photo by Jiri Novak

Whitemud Creek South, April 3, 2018



Photo by Manna Parseyan

As we stood in the parking lot several Canada Geese and two Pileated Woodpeckers flew overhead. With several recent reports of Barred Owls in the ravine, seventeen of us headed up the trail with high hopes. At the first bridge over the creek, we stopped to look at the giant slabs of ice that remained after the water underneath had drained away. As we made our way up the trail juncos, siskins, and redpolls twittered and buzzed in the tree tops. At one stop we encountered the noisiest group of Boreal Chickadees ever. Waxwings flew over and a murder of crows swirled above. Whenever we stopped we could hear Downy Woodpeckers drumming away.

At the old Barred Owl nesting site we scoured the area, but no Barred Owls. We moved further along the trail and as we stopped to turn around and head back, Emily caught up to say there was a Northern Shrike back along the trail. Several of the group saw the shrike as it flew from a perch across the creek. On the way back to the parking lot we observed squirrels chasing each other through the trees and glimpsed a Snowshoe Hare, a Downy Woodpecker in bright sunlight, and several white California Gulls against the blue sky.

Chris Rees



Snowshoe Hare, Photo by Chris Rees

Chris Rees

Kennedale Pond and Ravine, March 20, 2018

Spring arrived at 10:15 today. We celebrated by seeing our first spring migrants; 3 Canada geese and 2 American crows. The first Canada Goose was well hidden in among a flock of 50 or so Mallards on the ice at the edge of the open water of the lagoon. We started up the ravine and immediately spotted a Black-backed Woodpecker, reminding us that winter still holds on. The remainder of the hike featured the birds you would expect at this time of year, with perhaps a few more Blue Jays. At one point the jays and magpies became quite noisy, so we were hoping for an owl. Before we dispersed, a quick walk to the river produced 12 common Goldeneyes, but no mergansers.



Canada Goose, Photo by Wayne Oakes

Chris Rees

Bittern Lake, March 18, 2018

Mid-March can be a hopeful time in the birding year, but many years the hope is in vain. And this year that's very true! We set out to the southeast hoping for some early migrants but the only ones we found were Horned Lark, Crow, and Starling.



Snow Buntings, Photo by Manna Parseyan

We did get an interesting start when a couple of Gray Partridge flew over the parking lot at the meeting spot by Wildbird General Store. Down on the west side of Bittern Lake the lead vehicle almost missed a flock of Snow Buntings, but we got a call on the radio and were able to get a look.

A little ways down the road a Ring-necked Pheasant showed up right on cue where one was seen the day before.



Red-necked Pheasant, Photo by Colleen Raymond

The one species we always hope for at this time of year is Horned Lark. Sometimes it can be a challenge to get everyone a decent look when the birds flush off the road ahead of the lead vehicle. Apparently on last year's trip, the dividing line between those that saw a lark and those that didn't ran right behind the front seat of the lead vehicle. We did better this year and people in all four vehicles got a good look.

Our early spring trip was pretty wintery with lots of snow on the ground and very few migrant birds, but we saw a few nice birds and had a good time.



Horned Lark, Photo by Steve Knight

Gerald Romanchuk

Whitemud South, March 13, 2018

It was a clear -10°C morning when eleven of us set out. The trails had re-frozen hard with a good rough surface. A huge ice dam had built up behind the first bridge on the trail. As we entered the woods Red-breasted Nuthatches and Black-capped Chickadees greeted us, and flocks of waxwings were overhead. We stopped in a spruce thicket and saw Brown Creepers, then flushed a Merlin. At the stairs out of the ravine, a large flock of Bohemian Waxwings were feeding in the trees and flying down to the creek to drink. By the time we were back at the parking lot, it had warmed to 0°C and we agreed we were lucky to be able to enjoy such a beautiful morning.



Photo by jiri Novak



Pileated Woodpecker, Photo by Chris Rees

Chris Rees

Tofield and Beaverhills Area and Elk Island, March 10, 2018

We had a great pair of outings on Saturday, first around Tofield and Beaverhills and in the evening around Elk Island. There were new folks out on both the afternoon and evening, with 27 individuals for the day. It was above zero during the day and not too cold at night, which made for a really nice outing.

We started North of Tofield via Highway 16, and stopped a few places where trees were built up along farm houses to listen. Normal birds such as Black-capped Chickadees and White-breasted Nuthatches made their presence known, along with numerous Black-billed Magpies. We spent a bit of time in the neighbourhoods on the west side of Tofield and saw a Northern Flicker in one of the yards, but nothing else new for the day list. After the drive through town we stopped by the Francis Point feeders and saw a pair of Hairy Woodpeckers and some Common Redpolls.

Further east we encountered a Great Horned Owl perched in a tree on the side of the road. It sat patiently enough for a scope to be brought out until a Raven began to harass it. It came very close to becoming a casualty when the Great Horned Owl suddenly leapt into action. Chris Rees managed to get a shot of the action. Both the Raven and our group were surprised by how fast the owl could fly.



Raven and Great Horned Owl, Photo by Chris Rees

Further north we encountered a group of Snow Buntings, lifers for several people on the trip. Typically, they were found in exposed earth in a field. Before long, 6 Horned Larks were observed on the road ahead (also lifers for some). Everybody was able to get a good look before they left. I was surprised that we had only had 13 species, but quality won out versus quantity.

After regrouping for dinner and meeting up with the next group for owling, we made our way towards Elk Island Park. It was a very quiet night. After many stops we only had a few Snow Buntings and a lot of coyotes. Near the end of the evening we did hear a pair of Great Horned Owls calling back and forth to each other in the usual spot. Unfortunately, no Sawwhets were vocalizing that evening, so the Great Horned Owls stole the show once again.

Thank you, Brian Stephens, for leading the field trips!

Sean Evans

Whitemud North, March 6, 2018

Nine of us headed out on a beautiful blue sky day with the temperature around -8°C . Overhead Ravens were performing their spectacular springtime aerial maneuvers. Small groups of Pine Siskins were active in the treetops, and flocks of Bohemian Waxwings passed overhead. On the way back, Pileated Woodpeckers were drumming to the season, but there were no Brown Creepers!



Highbush Cranberry (Viburnum trilobum)
Photo by Manna Paryseyan



Winter snow pack, Photo by Jiri Novak

Chris Rees



Cross Lake, February 24, 2018

Sixteen of us met up bright and early for a drive up to Cross Lake. It was a bit cool and breezy, but the bright sunshine felt good.

North of Morinville, we had to leave the Big Power Pole Road to find a bird. Taking a bit of a detour towards Egg Lake, we stumbled across a Snowy Owl sitting on a snowy field. Things were pretty routine, with the radio banter trying to describe where numerous Snow Buntings were flying. Further north, Chris spotted a covey of Gray Partridge, most of which had just their little heads sticking above the snow.

We stopped at a couple of farmyards with feeders. One was very productive, and most of the group was pretty keen to see the Evening Grosbeaks we heard as soon as we stopped.

Going into Cross Lake, we were surprised to see a lone Mallard sitting beside a small patch of open water at the bridge.



Mallard, Photo by Chris Rees

We went on a short, mostly birdless walk. There was some grumbling about the direction we took, but no one caught us!



Photo by Chris Rees

We picked up 2 Great Gray Owls south of Cross Lake, both of which were fairly distant and tricky to spot. Thanks to all the participants, and to Colleen Raymond for eBirding!

Gerald Romanchuk

MacTaggart Sanctuary, February 10, 2018



Photo by Jiri Novak

We had a pretty good turnout, a group of 23 with a few new people. The weather was very warm compared to earlier in the week, which I think contributed to the number of birds we encountered. We did not see very many species, but this was one of those quality versus quantity days.

The morning started out fairly slowly as we made our way into the trails. There were a few Black-capped Chickadees and Black-billed Magpies, but not much else. We decided to walk across the lake, as the surface was flat and well frozen. Before long we heard and then saw a small flock of Red Crossbills. We had to look to the tops of the spruce trees to see them, but everybody got a nice view as they hung around for several minutes. We came across Red Crossbills in a different section of the walk, but they were likely the same group of birds.



Red Crossbill, Photo by Gerald Romanchuk

Continuing along the trail we heard and saw a pretty decent number of Black-capped Chickadees, a few Downy Woodpeckers, Bohemian Waxwings, Pine Grosbeaks, and a single Pine Siskin. Further along the river we passed a group of Boreal Chickadees, and a few folks saw a distant Merlin chasing some Waxwings. We walked along the river until the surface looked wet and then walked over land for awhile. Colleen noticed a Great Horned Owl feather hanging on a spruce branch, but no owl to accompany it.

Near the end of the walk we came across a group of Blue Jays and Dark-eyed Juncos. It was a scenic day for a walk with good company. Thank you to Jiri Novak and Brian Stephens for navigation through the trails!

Sean Evans



Photo by Manna Paryseyan

Mill Creek – A Change of Plan, February 3, 2018

We were supposed to head to the southeast for a driving trip on Saturday, but with a foot of snow Friday night and questionable roads, we decided to stay in the city and go for a walk in Mill Creek. Our group of 10 birders parked on 75 Avenue and walked south and north on the trails. It was pretty cool and several people were dressed for driving more than walking, but we toughed it out and found a few decent birds.

Connor heard a Golden-crowned Kinglet and the group had a good look at two of the tiny little guys. Hard to believe a bird that weighs barely more than a hummingbird can make it through our winters! We were looking for ducks on a patch of open water when someone spotted a Robin perched right above it. Some Mallards were seen just down the creek. We heard a Brown Creeper north of 76 Avenue, and a male Black-backed Woodpecker was tapping away at eye level near one of the bridges.



American Robin, Photo by Colleen Raymond

So we didn't cruise around the country, but we got in a good walk and some exercise! Thanks to everyone for understanding the need for a change of plans.

Gerald Romanchuk

Strathcona Riverside Trail, January 27, 2018

Ten of us braved the cold snowy morning on Saturday for a walk along the Strathcona riverside trail. This was the day after getting about 15 cm of snowfall, so we were breaking trail all morning. The walk started out with relatively few birds, so I was paying more attention to the tracks in the fresh snow, which indicated that there might have been a weasel in the area. Not two minutes later Brian shouts, "Weasel!" Sure enough, a Short-tailed Weasel hanging out along the trail stuck around for everyone to get good looks at it.

The birding was relatively quiet, save for a few (>1000) wax-wings keeping us company:



Bohemian Waxwing, Photo by Gerald Romanchuk

Somewhat more disturbing was a deceased Great Horned Owl Gerald spotted across the river. Any theories on what happened here?



Photo by Wayne Oakes

In an effort to find a real live owl for my trip, I decided to knock on a promising tree with some nice cavities in it. Instead of an owl, out popped these demonic nocturnal critters:



Flying Squirrels, Photos by Gerald Romanchuk

After slogging through the deep snow for three hours, some of us were pretty wiped out, but thank you to all who joined!

Connor Charchuk

Alberta Grain Terminal, January 22, 2018

About twenty people arrived at the grain terminal by 10:15 a.m. We were treated to a low fly-by by an almost full adult Bald Eagle. It still had some dark patches on the cheek, but the tail feathers were pure white. This is the same eagle we have been seeing there for the past few weeks.

Jim Lang gave us a very interesting account of his observations of the Gyrfalcon and Prairie Falcon activity at this site, which he began recording in the early 1990s.



Photo by Sean Evans

A Merlin flew in, perched on the terminal face, and changed positions a few times while we watched.

By noon, a few people had left and other ENC members arrived. At 12:30, a Prairie Falcon flew hunting circles and perched a few times on the top antenna before heading east. By 1:00 p.m. all ENC participants had departed, leaving only myself, Keith Huang, Jim Lang, and a couple from Seattle who came up here for the terminal action and other birding opportunities. They told me that they hooked up earlier with Martin Sharp and had a great outing with him.

At 1:15 p.m. the Prairie Falcon came back and in a matter of seconds captured a pigeon and took her catch to the roof of the Cookie Factory to eat. After about 40 minutes, she flew to the antenna and perched for a few minutes before flying away south with a full crop.

Don Delaney

**Prairie Falcon, adult with a broken primary tip
Photo (top left, page 29) by Don Delaney**



Genesee, Keephills, and Seba Beach, January 13, 2018

A crew of 17 birders headed out west on Saturday to bird the open water at Genesee and Keephills. We were happy that the extreme cold warnings of the previous week had lifted and we enjoyed temperatures closer to 0 °C.

Things got off to a good start on the way to Genesee. Well, not so good for the deer that had an unfortunate encounter with a vehicle and ended up dead in the ditch, but it was feeding a large gathering of Ravens, Magpies, and both Golden and Bald Eagles.

Genesee Lake had a variety of swans, geese, and ducks. On the way to Keephills, we had to stop at a woodlot on RR34. Apparently some of the group had seen a bird there 12 years ago, and now we have to stop every time!

It was pretty quiet at first, just a Boreal Chickadee, but some light tapping was heard and we tracked down a Three-toed Woodpecker that put on a great show of its drumming skills. It was a nice year bird for most of us.



Golden Eagle, Photo by Chris Rees

Over at the north end of the Keephills Pond, we got a nice Golden Eagle fly-by and a good look at both Trumpeter and Tundra Swans, plus a great game of “Where’s Waldo?” when a single Pintail flew into a flock of hundreds of Mallards. Can you find it in Chris’s swan photo?



Swans and ducks, Photo by Chris Rees

At the Duck Feeder access off of Hwy 627 we scoped lots of ducks and found a female Barrow’s Goldeneye fairly close to the parking area.



Photo by Chris Rees

At one point Manna quietly asked about one particular duck. It was the Long-tailed that had been seen last week! This didn’t seem fair to those of us who had to walk about a kilometre further last week to see it!



Long-tailed Duck, Photo by Gerald Romanchuk

We continued west past Sundance then over to Seba Beach, where we visited Mike Greaney. His yard was full of birds – woodpeckers, Gray Jays, Boreal Chickadees, Redpolls, etc. In the “back 40” we found a Pine Grosbeak feeding on the Tamarack and Black Spruce. When we got back to the yard we managed to track down a couple of Brown Creepers and get most of the group a look.

It was a great day with a great group and some awesome birds! Big thanks to the participants, the photographers and to Colleen for eBirding.

Gerald Romanchuk

Edmonton Nature Club Annual Banquet

I hope you all had fun at this year’s banquet; I know I did. There was a great vibe at the banquet and not too many surprises, which always makes my job easier. One hundred and seventeen of us came out to enjoy John Marriott as he wove his stories with humour and in some cases even acted them out! Thank you to Alan Hingston for finding yet another great speaker to entertain us.

The Great Gray Owl Outstanding Service Award was presented to Patsy Cotterill, and John Jaworski received the Robert Turner Appreciation award. It’s always a pleasure to see hard-working volunteers recognized for their contributions.

This year’s Bird of the Year was revealed to be the Pygmy Owl. This was a tightly kept secret known only to the committee and three of the artists in the club who were asked to create something to celebrate this cute little owl. Emily Gorda, Terri Susan Zurbrigg, and Jordan Lange each donated a piece of artwork to our already substantial pile of door prize goodies.

As a matter of fact, I will always think of 2018 as the year of the door prizes. Due to the generosity of so many, we had 14 items to give away. So thank you to the three donors listed above, as well as The Wildbird General Store, Meika’s Birdhouse, Janos and Joanie Kovacs, Monique Raymond, and Gerald Romanchuk.

See you next year!

Toby-Anne Reimer, Banquet Chair and Emcee

All banquet photos by Steve Knight



Toby-Anne Reimer, Emily Gorda and Toby-Anne, Gerald Romanchuk, Jan Zimmer (top left to right, bottom left to right)





Arnold Maki

Lynn Maki

Jayne Carre



Michael Cooley and Terri Susan Zurbrigg



Toby-Anne Reimer and Helen Otto



Toby-Anne Reimer and John E. Marriott



Colleen Raymond and Gerald Romanchuk

2018 ENC Banquet



Front:

Hubert Taube

Judith Golub

Patsy Cotterill

Back:

Elisabeth Beaubien

Manna Parseyan



Sean Evans



Ron Ramsey



Janice Hurlburt