

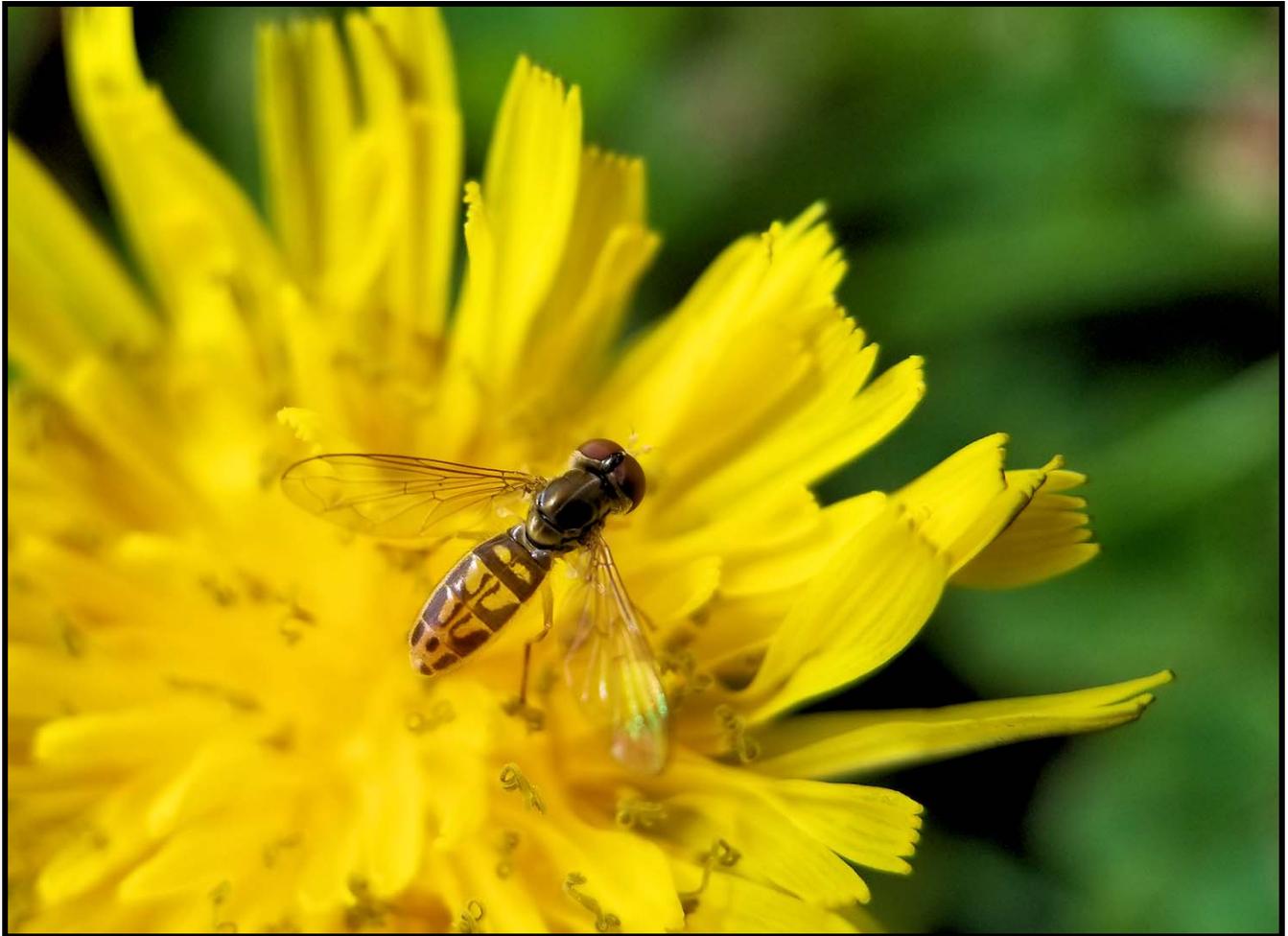
# THE PARKLAND NATURALIST



MAY–AUGUST 2019

A PUBLICATION OF THE  
EDMONTON NATURE CLUB

<http://www.edmontonnatureclub.ca>



## Inside this issue

Nature Appreciation Weekend 2019	2	Conservation Corner: A Book Review	10
President's Message	4	Buff-breasted Sandpipers in Central Alberta	12
Awards	6	Zim, Zan, and Tan: Backroads of Africa, Part 2	14
The Armchair Naturalist	7	ALG Medicine Hat Adventure	16
Restoration at Bunchberry Meadows – Watch This Space!	8	Summary of 2019 Plant ID Walks	19
		Field Trip Reports	20



## Nature Appreciation Weekend 2019

The wind was howling and driving the rain sideways across the highway. Not exactly great conditions for heading out to Miquelon Lake and setting up camp for the ENC's Nature Appreciation Weekend, August 16–18.

Luckily, the rain let up and the campers got set up in time to head over to the park's visitor centre. We had a very happy coincidence! Myrna Pearman, from the Ellis Bird Farm, was there to give a presentation on the same weekend.

In the evening the sky cleared up enough that we were able to look at Saturn's rings and Jupiter's moons. We enjoyed the campfire and then settled in for a fairly cool night.

Saturday morning we led a group of 20-plus nature enthusiasts on a hike out to Miquelon 2. There were plenty of insects, plants, and mushrooms to attract our attention. At the park's second lake, there were hundreds of shorebirds to sort through. We went from direct comparisons of the two Yellowlegs to puzzling over little peeps.

On the way back Jiri Novak showed us at least five different species of asters. He found seven species over the weekend and even got an old birder to remember how to ID a Showy Aster. You need to check to see if the underside of the leaves is rough like sandpaper.

After lunch Meghan Jacklin led off the show-and-tell session with some bee and bat boxes. Ted Hogg had begun to show us his bird photos when Janos Kovacs came in, excited because several birds were using a puddle near his trailer as a bird bath. It was cool to see a bunch of

chickadees, vireos, and warblers all taking their turns for a quick bath. After the interruption, we got to see the rest of Ted's excellent slide show.

Campers managed to finish off campfire dinner before rain settled in for the rest of the evening. Things cleared off nicely for Sunday morning and we went off for a walk around the Grebe Pond. Before we started birding, we met a young girl and her dad. The girl had found a beautiful Plains Garter Snake.

It was a cool morning, and we watched a large mixed flock of Purple Martins and Barn, Bank, and Tree Swallows swirling around down low and occasionally perching, giving us some good looks. The trail was very birdy, with lots of vireos, flycatchers, orioles, etc.

By lunch time the sun had warmed things up nicely. The campers dried their tents and we all packed up. Despite patches of sketchy weather, we had a really nice weekend. Lots of time to socialize and learn and enjoy several different aspects of nature. Thanks to all the participants and organizers for a great event!

### Gerald Romanchuk

**Photo Credits: Page 2 clockwise from top**  
*Photo of the group, by Jiri Novak*  
*Plains Garter Snake, by Gerald Romanchuk*  
*Birding group, by Myrna Pearman*  
*Warbling Vireo, by Ann Carter*  
*Meghan Jacklin with bat hotel, by Ann Carter*

**Page 3**  
*Lunch break, by Gerald Romanchuk, left*  
*Hoof fungus, by Colleen Raymond, below*



**On the Cover: *Toxomerus marginatus* (a hover fly, family Syrphidae) on Hawkweed**  
**Photo by Ann Carter**

## President's Message, Fall 2019



*Our President, Brian Stephens*

It has been a year since I became president. I would like to thank all the members of the executive – we have an excellent crew of volunteers who get things done and work well together. It has been a pleasure to have this kind of support for the club activities.

We have had a busy time in spite of the rainy weather. Chris Reese kept the city nature walks going, and even on the rainy days we were able to complete most walks, from Bunchberry to Sherwood Park to the Edmonton River Valley. These Thursday morning outings have been very successful, with 7 to 25 participants each, many of whom are new to the club. Thanks to some of our plant experts, we have also been learning about various plants on these outings.

The Plant Studies group, following up on the Plant ID Course, has been holding successful field trips throughout the summer. The number of trips is now 11 and counting, with more planned.

Nature Alberta's Nature Kids Celebrating Wild Nature event in April had to be postponed due to weather but went ahead the following weekend. Two full buses explored Miquelon and the Beaverhills biosphere and

thanks to our patient scouts, visited a flock of Snow Geese. Plans are afoot, headed up by the Town of Tofield, to bring back the Tofield-based festival next year. More to come in the fall.

Our annual Nature Appreciation Weekend was again a success at Miquelon Lake Provincial Park. We are exploring ways we can help update the status of the Miquelon Lake Important Bird Area, which includes all of the park as well as the west and north shores of the main lake and an area to the east of the park. The IBA was created several decades ago because the lake was a significant breeding site for Ring-billed and California Gulls. Over the years the lake itself has changed and we often find that it is an important fall stopover for migrating shorebirds and a resting point for migrating waterfowl. As caretakers for the IBA we hope to work with the park to update that status over the next year.

I am looking forward to our monthly speaker series starting in October and to our study group presentations over the winter.

### Brian Stephens



**ENC City walk, Heritage Hills Wetland, July 25, 2019**  
*American White Pelican, Photo by Chris Rees*

### **ENC Annual General Meeting for all members:** September 20, 2019

Refreshments and sign-in, 7:00pm, Meeting, 7:30pm  
King's University, 9125-50 St, room L116, Edmonton

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.

The ENC is not responsible for, and disclaims any liability for, the content expressed in *The Parkland Naturalist* by contributors. The information set forth in this publication has been obtained or derived from sources believed by the ENC to be reliable. However, the ENC does not make any representation or warranty, express or implied, as to the accuracy or completeness of the information.

**The Parkland Naturalist**  
 is published by the Edmonton Nature Club.  
 Box 1111, Edmonton, AB T5J 2M1  
<http://www.edmontonnatureclub.org>

**Executive  
 Elected Officers**

President – **Brian Stephens**  
[stephensbrian319@gmail.com](mailto:stephensbrian319@gmail.com)

Recording Secretary – **Colleen Raymond**  
[costan@shaw.ca](mailto:costan@shaw.ca)

Membership Secretary – **John Jaworski**  
[JohnGJaworski@gmail.com](mailto:JohnGJaworski@gmail.com)

Treasurer – **Katherine Madro**  
[kathrinemadro@gmail.com](mailto:kathrinemadro@gmail.com)

Executive Director – **Gerald Romanchuk**  
[geraldjr@telusplanet.net](mailto:geraldjr@telusplanet.net)

Executive Director – **Hendrik Kruger**  
[hendrik296@gmail.com](mailto:hendrik296@gmail.com)

Executive Director – **Chris Rees**  
[csrees@shaw.ca](mailto:csrees@shaw.ca)

Executive Director – **Sean Evans**  
[sean.evans74@yahoo.com](mailto:sean.evans74@yahoo.com)

**Appointed  
 Board Members**

*Program*

Indoor Program Director – **Alan Hingston**  
[hingston@telusplanet.net](mailto:hingston@telusplanet.net)

Outdoor Program Director – **Sean Evans**  
[sean.evans74@yahoo.com](mailto:sean.evans74@yahoo.com)

Bird Studies – **Karen Lindsay**  
[kdinds@telus.net](mailto:kdinds@telus.net)

Bug and Spider Studies – **Pat Dunn**  
[patdunn001@gmail.com](mailto:patdunn001@gmail.com)

Plant Studies – **Patsy Cotterill and Hubert Taube**  
[nutmeg@planet.eon.net](mailto:nutmeg@planet.eon.net) / [taubeha@shaw.ca](mailto:taubeha@shaw.ca)

*Annual Events*

Banquet – **Toby-Anne Reimer**  
[obitay@gmail.com](mailto:obitay@gmail.com)

Edmonton Christmas Bird Count – **Lynn and Arnold Maki**  
[maki2@telus.net](mailto:maki2@telus.net)

Nature Appreciation Weekend – **Gerald Romanchuk**  
[geraldjr@telusplanet.net](mailto:geraldjr@telusplanet.net)

*Communications*

Communications Director – **Ann Carter**  
[anncarter005@gmail.com](mailto:anncarter005@gmail.com)

Parkland Naturalist and Publications – **Dawne Colwell**  
[colwelld@shaw.ca](mailto:colwelld@shaw.ca)

*Group Representatives*

Conservation – **Hubert Taube**  
[taubeha@shaw.ca](mailto:taubeha@shaw.ca)

Edmonton and Area Land Trust – **Hendrik Kruger**  
[hendrik296@gmail.com](mailto:hendrik296@gmail.com)

Nature Alberta – **Len Shrimpton**  
[lenlau@telus.net](mailto:lenlau@telus.net)

**Membership**

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

**Membership Rates for 2018/19**

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



## Chickadee Award



Karen Lindsay has led our ENC Bird Study group since 2013. She actively seeks and books speakers and also has given her own excellent presentations. Her attention to detail ensures that many club members look forward to those evenings, which are always well attended.

Karen regularly attends ENC board meetings, educating herself on all aspects of the club. She communicates effectively regarding her group's activities and needs, and contributes to the work of the executive.

In addition, Karen compiles the Armchair Naturalist column for the *Parkland Naturalist*, providing reviews of birding resources.

It is a pleasure to have such a dedicated member working on behalf of our programs.

***Karen Lindsay receives the Chickadee Award from Brian Stephens, Photo by Gerald Romanchuk***

## A Note from Bob Parsons



June 20, 2019

Hope all are well. Today I was invited to the annual Oliver School award presentation, where many students were recognized for their past yearly efforts in sport, reading, leadership, etc.

I suspected something was up, and yes, I received the award for fine citizenship and volunteering with the school for all the past Chase outings.

Needless to say, I could never have done this on my own, so thanks everyone!

Yippee,  
Bob

***Bob Parsons, Snow Goose Chase, 2015, Photo by Gerald Romanchuk***

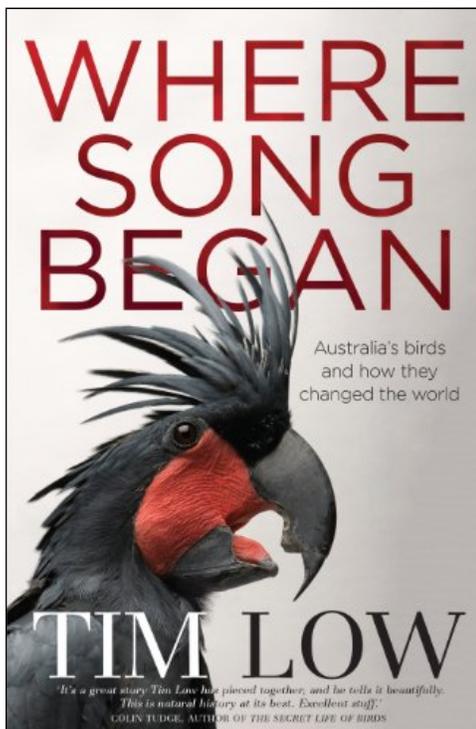
***Congratulations, Karen and Bob!***

## The Armchair Naturalist

The place where club members review books about natural history they found particularly rewarding. Some of the books recommended may be borrowed from the Edmonton Public Library (EPL). To check availability, go to [epl.ca](http://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](http://edmontonnatureclub.org). Click on “Birding,” “Bird Studies,” and “Contact” to send Karen your review.

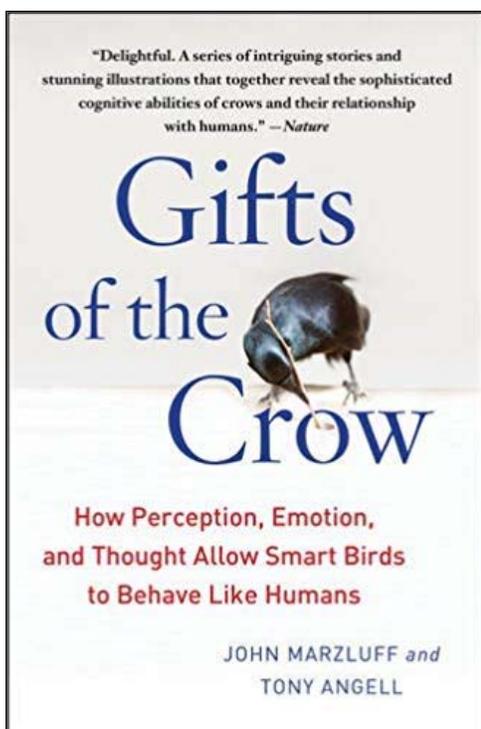
Karen is looking for more reviews on good nature books (birds, bugs, plants, etc.) to share!



“Compared with birds elsewhere, ours [Australia’s] are more likely to be intelligent, aggressive and loud, to live in complex societies, and are long-lived. They’re also ecologically more powerful, exerting more influences on forests than other birds. But unlike the mammals, the birds did not keep to Australia; they spread around the globe... [Tim Low] brilliantly explains how our birds came to be so extraordinary, including the large role played by the foods they consume (birds, too, are what they eat), and by our climate, soil, fire, and Australia’s legacy as a part of Gondwana.” ([penguin.com.au](http://penguin.com.au))

*Where Song Began* rated 5/5 stars in 21 reviews on Amazon. It is overflowing with information. This book should be on all birders’ shelves, as there is a lot of myth busting, so I would advise buying the book!

*Recommended by Elaine Mellor*



“Scientist John Marzluff teams up with artist-naturalist Tony Angell to tell amazing stories of these brilliant birds. With Marzluff’s extraordinary original research on the intelligence and startling abilities of corvids – crows, ravens, and jays – Angell’s gorgeous line drawings, and a lively joint narrative, the authors offer an in-depth look at these complex creatures and the traits and behaviors we share, including language, delinquency, frolic, passion, wrath, risk taking, and awareness. Crows gather around their dead, warn of impending doom, recognize people, commit murder of other crows, lure animals to their death, swill coffee and drink beer, design and use tools – including cars as nut-crackers – and windsurf and sled to play.” ([Amazon.ca](http://Amazon.ca))

I don’t remember who recommended this book, but I was intrigued enough to buy a copy. Although I haven’t had a chance to read it yet, after reading Steve Knight’s description on the Yahoo Group of corvid battles and the shenanigans of resident crows in his neighbourhood, I am intrigued even more!

*Recommended by Karen Lindsay*

## Restoration at Bunchberry Meadows – Watch This Space!

Visitors to Bunchberry Meadows in June were surprised as they drove in to see a different- looking landscape. This “moonscape” of hillocks and hollows of bare soil aroused considerable curiosity. Now (at the beginning of August) this same landscape is a billowing sea of green, proving the adage that nature abhors a vacuum. The contoured land is in fact the result of the application of a new restoration technique called “rough and loose soil treatment,” which is becoming popular as a means to promote growth of natural vegetation in disturbed areas.

Kristen Andersen, a restoration specialist based in Devon, was awarded a contract for this restoration project by the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) and the Edmonton and Area Land Trust (EALT), manager-owners of Bunchberry Meadows. It includes revegetation of areas disturbed during parking lot and access road construction, including the upland slopes, and creating wetland around a former dugout. Kristen followed the model established by fellow restoration professional David Polster of B.C., to re-establish deciduous forest in this area using the rough and loose soil technique that is focused on creating conditions to assist natural recovery and removing filters to recovery such as soil compaction. As the forest recovers, canopy closure will deter weeds that require sunlight.

The rough and loose technique requires an excavator to scoop up soil and dump it to form little hills and depressions. This decompacts the soil, making it easier for roots to penetrate and grow, and produces a more heterogeneous landscape of microsites that can accommodate a diversity of species. The land can then be seeded or transplanted, or simply left to revegetate naturally from propagules blown in by wind or transported by animals. At Bunchberry this last is the chief method chosen (possibly in part because of limited budgets), although closer to the access road 300 donated jack pine seedlings have been planted on the sides of the mounds. If natural seeding processes prove insufficient, the idea is to supplement with live poplar stakes (cuttings of sufficient size to root naturally when planted). Kristen has used live-staking successfully to prevent erosion of shorelines and unstable slopes in other restoration projects. Excavation was done in mid-June this year. It is envisioned that a fairly dense thicket of poplar (balsam and aspen) and shrubs will occur as a first stage, which in time will thin out to become a mature forest with normal tree spacing. As well, logs and upright snags have been scattered amongst the mounds. These mimic woody debris found in natural communities and help reduce run-off and erosion. They will also provide organic matter and nutrients to the soil as they gradually decompose. And they should prove at-

tractive as bird perching spots – bird poop is a great source of seeds!

Restoration of the dugout wetland was begun last fall, including some live-staking done by Kristen and volunteers. This year mounding of the surrounds, contouring of the slopes and some levelling of the shoreline has taken place, as well as further live-staking, the work of Kristen and University of Alberta students. Members of the Edmonton Native Plant Society (ENPS) have planted riparian and other species on the slopes and shoreline, with further plantings anticipated. On the flat, sandy portion on the north side of the access road, Cherry Dodd and Adrian Jones of the Edmonton Native Plant Society are in the process of creating native plant beds featuring typical local grassland species.

Revegetation of the area adjacent to the parking lot was begun last fall with the planting of commercially obtained native shrubs by volunteers. A small slope behind the parking bays was seeded by Rob Belanger’s group at the University of Alberta with native seed collected from sandy sites north of Edmonton. However, with the exception of some hairy golden-aster and meadow blazingstar, no germination has occurred so far. Likely many of the seeds were washed away during the spring snowmelt. Some mounding has also been done in the area west of the toilets.

A sign posted on the bulletin board in the parking lot area explains the restoration process and promises that it will be ongoing, with weed control undertaken (the green “sea” is currently of weeds, but this is to be expected as a primary succession stage in an area that was once agricultural), and further plantings of natives.

On the whole, I believe Bunchberry Meadows’ restoration is an intriguing experiment that will keep interested parties, not least the two land trusts, watching, monitoring, and practicing adaptive management for some time to come. There are lots of questions to find answers to. Will the rough and loose mounding technique succeed? Will native propagules arrive? Should weed management be fairly aggressive, or should succession be allowed to take its natural course (i.e., from annual weeds to perennial weeds to, hopefully, shrubs and trees)? Will the jack pine seedlings and the subsequent deciduous woody material succumb to browsing by deer and moose? Will a heavy weed growth encourage small herbivores such as voles? Certainly, the NCC and EALT will have plenty of scope for interpretation, possibly to a skeptical public, as things develop.

I for one have been outspoken about the idea that bare ground will automatically regenerate with natives once the weeds have been removed, at least in urban areas or modified landscapes. Nevertheless, the mounding method seems to make sense, and is verified in the literature as good ground preparation for subsequent plant growth and survival. So, I could be proved wrong. In any case, Bunchberry provides an accessible resource for observing and learning from the regeneration process, and with proper documentation of the project, I see scope for academic papers coming out of this.

We may discover just how difficult and time-demanding it is to bring disturbed habitats back to nature. Preservation in the first place is always the better option. In the meantime, like kids with new chemistry sets, we can expect to learn and to have some fun!



An uncommon but attractive weed, introduced from Europe, is abundant along the drier trails in Bunchberry: hoary plantain (*Plantago media*), with narrower leaves than the common plantain (*Plantago major*). It seems to be spreading, both into the meadows and the forest edges, and as a non-native, should be controlled. Another common weed of the sandy trails is the yellow Potentilla, silvery cinquefoil (*Potentilla argentea*). Both have long flowering periods, from June through August.

Here are some links for further reading:

<https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007%2Fs13595-017-0647-9.pdf>

<https://www.ealt.ca/blog/whats-going-on-at-bunchberry-meadows>

[https://www.google.com/search?q=rough+and+loose+reclamation&rlz=1C1CHBD\\_enCA860CA860&oq=rough+and+loose&aqs=chrome.0.0j69i57j0l4.6507j0j8&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8](https://www.google.com/search?q=rough+and+loose+reclamation&rlz=1C1CHBD_enCA860CA860&oq=rough+and+loose&aqs=chrome.0.0j69i57j0l4.6507j0j8&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8)

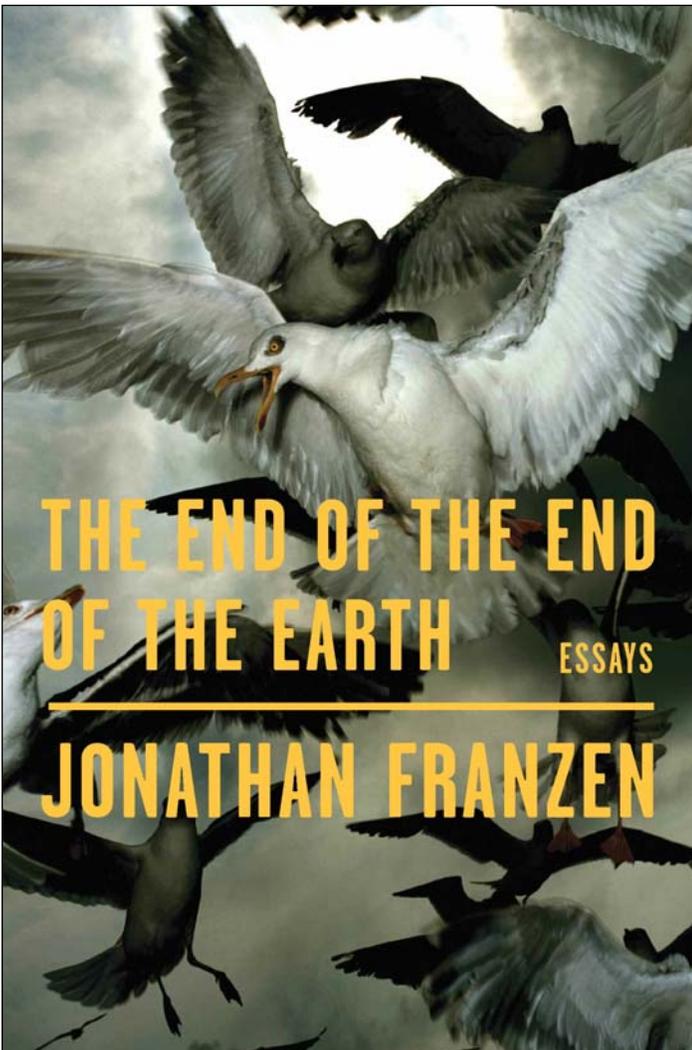
<http://cfs.nrcan.gc.ca/pubwarehouse/pdfs/36968.pdf>

*Patsy Cotterill*



Leathery grapefern, *Sceptridium multifidum*, is a member of the adder's-tongue family of ferns, Ophioglossaceae. In this family the spore-bearing structures are like clusters of tiny round grapes that turn golden when ripe. This species is unusual among its relatives in that its leafy fronds are on stalks separate from the spore-bearing stalk (upper portion of picture). By the beginning of August, 29 plants had been counted at Bunchberry, an unprecedentedly large population. All were in patches of common wild strawberry that extended as "skirts" around the base of white spruce or shrubs in the sandy meadows.

## Conservation Corner: A Book Review



***The End of the End of the Earth: Essays* by Jonathan Franzen.** 2018. Bond Street Books, Penguin, Random House, Canada.

I greatly admire Jonathan Franzen as a novelist, and I knew of his interest in birds and conservation from reading his novel *Freedom*, in which the protagonist sets up a reserve in West Virginia to protect the Cerulean Warbler. Hence I was keen to gain further insights into his views from his non-fiction.

There are 16 essays in this collection, of which about half are about birds and conservation, particularly as it relates to birds, and the other half about the other love of his life, literature. It is worth buying or borrowing this book even if you only read the chapters on birds. A caution though: given that it contains much about conservation, or lack of it, don't expect it will all make pleasurable reading. Some of the essays may evoke tears.

Early on in the book Franzen apologizes for being a lister

rather than “a pure-hearted birder,” and momentarily I doubted whether name-dropping of exotic birds in unknown countries would be my bag, but his superior writing skills, combining humour and honesty, politics and personal experience, soon dispelled any fear of boredom from excessive lists. In any case, he isn't just a lister, a rich American who can afford to indulge a passion, he's a pure-hearted conservationist, and a critical thinker. For example, a pet peeve of his is the danger of making climate change a scapegoat for all environmental ills, “a preoccupation with future catastrophes that discourages us from tackling solvable environmental problems in the here and now.” He calls out the National Audubon Society for using the public's focus on climate change as an opportunity for PR and increasing membership dues, pretending it's the number one threat to birds in North America when it's really habitat loss and outdoor cats. He questions why windmills have to be placed in ecologically sensitive areas, and, in an example which strikes close to home given Epcor's proposed solar farm in Edmonton's river valley, whether it wouldn't make more sense to cover the city of Los Angeles with solar panels rather than have solar farms in the Mojave Desert.

*“The Earth as we know it resembles a patient with bad cancer. We can choose to treat it with disfiguring aggression, damming every river and blighting every landscape with biofuel agriculture, solar farms and wind turbines, to buy some extra years of moderate warming. Or we can adopt a course of treatment that permits a higher quality of life, still fighting the disease but protecting the areas where wild animals and plants are hanging on, at the cost of slightly hastening the human catastrophe. One advantage of the latter approach is that, if a miracle cure like fusion energy should come along, or if global consumption rates and population should ever decline, there might still be some intact ecosystems to save.”*

In the essay “Save What You Love,” Franzen describes two promising conservation projects that involve re-forestation, one in Peru on the Andean slopes and the other in Costa Rica, and concludes that “the way to save a forest is to give people who live in it alternatives to cutting it down.”

Most of the excursions he describes in other essays are less happy, and I don't just mean that he fails to find his target species. In “May Your Life Be Ruined” (the admonition a young boy shouts out to a bird eluding capture), he describes how Albania under communism was relatively benign for birds: only a small elite had hunting privileges and the country's unattractiveness to beach tourists left coastal habitat secure; however, under the

current market economy young men have become prosperous enough to own guns and shoot birds, adopting their Italian masters' tradition of eating small birds. The result, Janzen says, is that Albania has become a giant sinkhole for eastern European migrants; although a hunting ban is currently in effect, he notes that enforcement is difficult.

Things are even worse in Egypt: he describes a situation in which young Bedouins encamped in a grove of acacias in the desert killed every bird that flew in. Janzen quotes an estimate of 5000 golden orioles taken at a single location annually. Worst yet is the falcon trapping practice that also takes place in Egypt. Pigeons are tied to stakes in the sand and left in the sun to attract raptors; doves and quail are equipped with nylon traps to enmesh the desired Saker and Peregrine falcons that fetch huge prices; small falcons, such as Kestrels, used as decoys, have their eyelids sewn shut and a weight attached to one leg. Franzen describes hunters driving around the desert in their Toyota pickups, checking on the staked pigeons and hurling the Kestrels into the air "like footballs." At the end of the season the decoy falcons have their eyelids unsutured so they can feed themselves, and are released. Franzen describes a heart-rending experience in which a Kestrel, still unsutured, pecks away its bonds and flies off blind, preferring freedom and certain death from starvation to its bondage. He observes that modern technology has greatly aided capture and slaughter; the use of playback tapes, for instance, and trucks in which to careen around the desert accessing the oases. Reading these essays I found myself wondering more than once why everybody isn't an atheist: surely it would be a stupid God who fashioned a creature so clever and cruel that it exploits and kills off all his other creatures!

Tear-jerkers though these accounts are, it is nevertheless not deliberate cruelty but the unintentional but careless killing of birds by ordinary human practice that should perhaps horrify us most. In the essay "Invisible Losses," Franzen quotes the statistic of an estimated 400,000 seabirds killed each year by gill-netting, with more (e.g., albatrosses) dying on the hooks of long-line fishing vessels. He fingers China and Taiwan, with two-thirds of the fishing vessels on the high seas, as being especially indifferent to seabird mortality. Other causes of death include overfishing of the small fish that birds eat, plastic pollution, and climate change; introduced rodents on islands (e.g., Gough Island in the South Atlantic) chow down on millions of chicks. On the positive side, he tells the story of the work and success of a Maori family in protecting the Magenta Petrel or Chatham Island tāiko, and other endangered seabirds.

It is clear that many of his experiences cause Franzen great pain, and he condemns them, but his condemnation

is not shrill or even overt. He seeks to present the facts and let them speak for themselves. Being a privileged, educated American among indigenes makes him uncomfortably humble, one suspects; he is wary of blaming and shaming and conscious of the injustice in that "the rich but biotically poor countries of Europe and North America need tropical countries to do the work of safeguarding global biodiversity."

The title essay, which I still haven't figured out (does he mean the end of Antarctica, or the end of prophecies of Earth's impending doom?) ends the book and has a dual theme; the developing relationship with his uncle and his cruise to Antarctica financed by his uncle's legacy. On the cruise, he earns kudos for being the first to spot an Emperor Penguin, and describes the subsequent encounter as follows: "...the Emperor Penguin appeared to be holding a press conference. While a cluster of Adélies came up from behind it, observing like support staff, the Emperor faced the press corps (a barrage of ship's passengers armed with cameras) in a posture of calm dignity. After a while, it gave its neck a leisurely stretch. Demonstrating its masterly balance and flexibility, and yet without seeming to show off, it scratched behind its ear with one foot while standing fully erect on the other. And then, as if to underline how comfortable it felt with us, it fell asleep." Nevertheless, his favourites were definitely the King Penguins. "To see a King Penguin in the wild... seemed reason enough to have been born on this planet." The only foreboding note in this essentially positive and hopeful chapter has to do with the uncertainty over krill stocks, the food of the penguins, as large increases in harvesting are being proposed, particularly by China. Climate change is alluded to only obliquely, for example, when Franzen notes that on the cruise few people went to the lecture on climate change, but almost all passengers attended the final photo presentation!

After musing in his usual nuanced way on the environmental virtue of childlessness, yet his unwillingness to imagine a world without young people, and in reference to the life of his uncle, Janzen concludes: "Even in a world of dying, new loves continue to be born." (Only I am afraid, if there is no extinction.)

Franzen has contributed to bird conservation as an intrepid and resourceful ecotourist and particularly as an ambassador for birds as a man of letters. I presume that in the future he will do even more.

*Patsy Cotterill*

## Buff-breasted Sandpipers in Central Alberta

As reported last year in *Parkland Naturalist*, Brian Genereux observed and photographed a flock of about 75 Buff-breasted Sandpipers at Whitford Lake on May 22, 2018. Again this year, on May 25, at the same location, Brian photographed a flock of about 50 buffies (see picture). As far as I know, these sightings pertain to the largest groups of buffies reported in central Alberta for a long time.

In 1964, when I had just moved to Edmonton, Robert Lister, spokesman for the Edmonton Bird Club, said that Beaverhills Lake was renown for these pretty shorebirds with their peculiar courting rituals, in which males flap their open wings at the females. On their way from South America to Arctic breeding grounds, flocks of buffies were believed to touch down on two places only, the Texas Gulf Coast and Beaverhills Lake. We now know they may also be seen at other places, but usually in small numbers.

ral and Baird's Sandpipers, the buffies were feasting on the masses of lake flies that had dropped down into the short grass to evade the brisk wind. Suddenly, when the flocks flushed in alarm, I was hoping to see a hunting Peregrine and was lucky enough to pick one up in the binoculars, climbing high in pursuit of the buffies and making a catch. Lowering the glasses, I saw two people approaching on the old stone house trail. They turned out to be Peter Thompson and Reginald Heath, prominent members of the Edmonton Bird Club. They had seen the buffies, but not the Peregrine. I was glad they had not arrived a few minutes earlier, when they might have disturbed the birds.

Indulging in my specific passion of watching falcons hunt shorebirds, I usually sit down well away from the water line. The chance of seeing an attack is gone when people are walking by the shore. However, on one very memorable occasion, the arrival of another birder led to a unique observation. That evening I was standing by my



*A flock of about 50 Buff-breasted Sandpipers at Whitford Lake in August 2019. Note the light-coloured underwings.*

**Photo by Brian Genereux**

Up to the 1980s, buffies predictably arrived at the lake in the third or last week of May. I remember a brilliant morning when the pastures on the north end, near the old windmill, thronged with them. In the company of Pecto-

car parked at the northwest corner of the lake, enjoying a wide-open view on the north and west shores. Through the glasses, I picked up a distant falcon. As it came closer, I saw it was an immature male Peregrine. When a flock of about 30 buffies flushed from a ploughed field,

the falcon made a shallow pass at them but flew on. Two or three km farther, he landed on a fence post. While I kept the glasses focused, another birder, whom I happened to know personally, stopped by and asked what I was looking at. “A Peregrine,” I said, without taking my eyes off the distant speck. Getting out of his car, the guy set up his telescope, and I suggested that we should keep an eye on the bird, for it might start hunting again soon. It took much longer than I thought, and I relieved the strain by glancing around, scanning the lake shore. Fortunately, my co-observer kept his scope glued on the target. “Tell me when he flies,” I asked.

The evening was drawing to a close and, at last, the falcon flew off. Moving his scope, my patient friend immediately lost sight of the Peregrine, but when I aimed the glasses, I picked up the bird approaching low over the darkening fields and gradually rising above the skyline. Directly in line with his flight path, a flock of buffies flushed, drawing together defensively into a dense sphere. The falcon slammed into the compact ball of birds just at the moment when the flock had risen high enough to catch the rays of the sun, which had already set below the horizon. At the moment of impact, the flock burst apart as if it had been hit by an exploding shell. Having seized its prey point-blank, the falcon planed down to the ground and landed near the base of a fence post. The following morning I walked the barbed-wire fence line and found the plucked remains of a buffy, the victim of one of the most spectacular Peregrine hunts I have ever seen.

In recent years, global declines of shorebirds have sparked increased attention from the scientific commu-

nity. In 1992, I was approached by Richard Lanctot, an American ornithologist who had embarked on a PhD study of the Buff-breasted Sandpiper, which had been listed as a species of concern. Aware of its regular occurrence at Beaverhills Lake, he paid me a visit at home to talk about what I had seen over the years. Richard’s current position is Shorebird Coordinator with Alaska’s Department of Fish and Game. One of his papers is titled “Light-level geolocation reveals migration patterns of the Buff-breasted Sandpiper” (Lanctot, *et al.* 2016. *Wader Study*, 123:29–43). In 2012 and 2013, Richard and his associates had captured 62 buffies on their wintering grounds in Argentina and Brazil and fitted the birds with tiny microchips and coloured leg flags. The following winter three of these birds were recaptured (shot). Their geolocator data, transferred to the computer screen, revealed how far they had flown. The distances matched or outdid what had become known of other long-distance migrants, including Golden Plover, Red Knot, and White-rumped Sandpipers. Two of the buffies, both females, had logged over 30,000 kilometres, the male 41,000 km. Travel time between departure from the pampas and their arrival on the arctic coast of Alaska was 1.5 months. Their south-bound return took 2.5 months. Although these data were limited to three individuals, the route they took across the American continent, passing over the Canadian prairie provinces, was recently confirmed after the researchers began using GSP satellite tags.

Along the way, the species may make feeding stops at a variety of locations. During late summer, I have seen the odd one or two buffies at Cooking Lake and Jasper Lake.

**Dick Dekker**

## Editorial Notes

Congratulations to Karen Lindsay, recipient of the ENC Chickadee Award, and to Bob Parsons, who received an award from Oliver School for fine citizenship and volunteering with all the Snow Goose Chase outings (see page 6).

Although field trip reports from the weekday ENC City Walks weren’t included in previous issues due to lack of space, we were able to highlight the July 11 Bunchberry Meadows walk on page 20 of this issue. All our field trip reports with additional photos can be seen on the ENC webpage.

Check the back page outside cover for a photo of a Great Horned Owl by Ludo Bogaert. This excellent photo should have been published with Ludo’s article, “Getting Owly,” in our January–April 2019 issue.

Thank you to all who contributed photos and articles to *The Parkland Naturalist*. The deadline for submissions for the September–December issue is November 30, 2019.

**Dawne Colwell, Editor**

## Zim, Zan, and Tan: Backroads of Africa, Part 2

On the way to Zambia's South Luangwa National Park, Bill and Marion experienced an underground termite swarm that became a bird bonanza. Sixteen bird species were seen to capitalize on this concentrated food source, as they swooped in to catch and de-wing the reproductive form of termites in mid-air. This all took place within 15 minutes of the start of the *isopteran* irruption. Not just the expected flycatchers and swallows were on-site predators, a range of small to large birds came in for the feast, from canaries and wren-warblers to crows and falcons.

The falcon in question turned out to be a wonderful example of post-shutter ID determination. Marion's photographs of birds were used to shed critical light on decision-making, even with a small lightweight Olympus mirrorless camera and a simple 40–150 mm lens. Zooming in often provided field marks they had either forgotten or didn't know they had to look for. Bill demonstrated this when engaging the audience in trying to determine the visual characteristics of a fast, high-flying falcon that Marion quickly snapped while it soared fairly high overhead. Without the photograph to ponder over, the momentary glimpse through the binoculars had suggested a peregrine. Upon closer scrutiny one could verify the lack

of spotting or barring on the breast feathers and the touch of brown on the top of the head pointing to a Lanner Falcon.

Images of the cruise down a river in South Luangwa National Park afforded us several examples of waterbirds, including pratincoles and lapwings. We witnessed in a video what could happen when the endemic go-away bird is not present to produce a predator alarm call. This would normally be heeded by the shore-nesting bird known as a Dikkop, a member of the suitably named thick-knee family. All hell broke loose for said Dikkop family because a Nile monitor lizard was searching the shoreline for the Dikkop nest and the parents were forced to defend with outstretched wings and beak jabs. Then a Pied Kingfisher joined the fray as it dove to harass the lizard, perhaps worried about the contents of its own bank nest. Quite an impressive display. The Pied Kingfisher hovered before his swoop attack, showing this unique flight form among African kingfishers. The rest of the kingfisher family drop from a perch when hunting; they never hover. The majority of the world's kingfishers do not fish!



*Giraffes, Photo by Marion Reynolds*

The land-based park safari our speaker took us on gave us great views of the expected zebras and giraffes while he pointed out how regional differences across Africa show up among subspecies of both, which are differentiated by patterns of stripes or blotches. A cardio fun fact was shared: the giraffe’s neck is so long that its heart has to pump blood up an artery 10 to 12 feet long, resulting in this mammal having the highest blood pressure in the world.

Selous Game reserve was the next great location for watching the big cats but it was the several types of bee-eaters that stole the show. Aptly named, these colourful chaps remove the stinger by repeatedly hitting and rubbing the insect on a hard surface. During this process, most of the venom is extracted. The *Life of Birds* DVD has excellent film footage of this process. Bee-eaters have been the focus of a study on plumage variations within males and females that appear to humans in the visible light spectrum as identical colouration. However, males have more intense colouration in the UV spectrum than females, allowing each gender to detect the other, even though we humans can’t.



An African endemic with only two members in its family is the Ground Hornbill. Their claim to fame is being the slowest in bird breeding (every 3 years) and longest lived – up to 70 years in captivity. During the dry season the vivid red patches of bare skin on the face and throat are generally believed to keep dust out of the birds’ eyes while they forage among grasses close to the ground.



**Bee-eaters (top), Ground Hornbill (below)  
Photos by Marion Reynolds**

Visiting Ruaha National Park exposed our members to several more intriguing denizens with the added excitement of seeing a new bird species only recently determined (not in guidebooks) and restricted to this park. The main physical determining factor related to its eyeball and orbital skin colour, otherwise the red-billed hornbill was identical (in visible spectrum light) to the Ruaha hornbill. Who knows, perhaps we should all be taking a more detailed ocular look at our resident birds to determine possible speciation.

Earlier in this summary it was mentioned that another example of a unique bird-feather-carrying situation would be shared. Solving this mystery connects us to an endemic species called a Sandgrouse. Sandgrouse eat mainly seeds with a low water content and require daily flights to drink from scattered pools. The dutiful males carry water back to their chicks in specially adapted belly feathers.

Ruaha allowed Bill and Marion to walk in the park with two gun-toting rangers who said it was a wonderful experience to be on the land, moving at a slow pace, instead of in a jeep all the time. Foot exploration does not happen very often and provides a chance to see smaller game versus BIG game. It allowed us to watch a chameleon ponderously move by using his Vulcan-arranged digits.



**Chameleon, Photo by Marion Reynolds**

As we all viewed a beautiful waxbill family member with the esoteric moniker of Cordon Bleu, Bill informed us that this species had to contend with a brood parasite that is not a cuckoo, as we might expect, but a bird called a Whydah. In this part of Africa, multiple species of birds (including cuckoos) use this lazy reproductive strategy.

This synopsis is just a taste of what was shared during Bill and Marion’s East African overland journey.

**Bill Reynolds**

*Conclusion (Part 2) regarding the Indoor Meeting January 18, 2019. Part 1 was published in the January-April issue of the PN*

## ALG Medicine Hat Adventure

On the weekend of June 14–16, we cruised down to Medicine Hat for the Alberta Lepidopterists' Guild's summer field trip event. We joined the group for camping at the Gas City Campground on the outskirts of town.

We'd heard a warning from John Acorn about the campground's sprinkler system and the danger of setting up a tent anywhere other than on the parking pad. But we were relieved to find a notice at the washroom building indicating the sprinklers ran from Sunday through Thursday. So since it was Friday night we felt safely "off" the scheduled spray times and were happy to set up our tent on the grass; a way more pleasant option than a hard gravel parking pad! Our site-mate Grace Kwong had already set up and was hogging the parking pad with her tent anyway. Of course we're just kidding, because Grace's tent doesn't look big enough to hold a Hobbit so doesn't take up very much room.

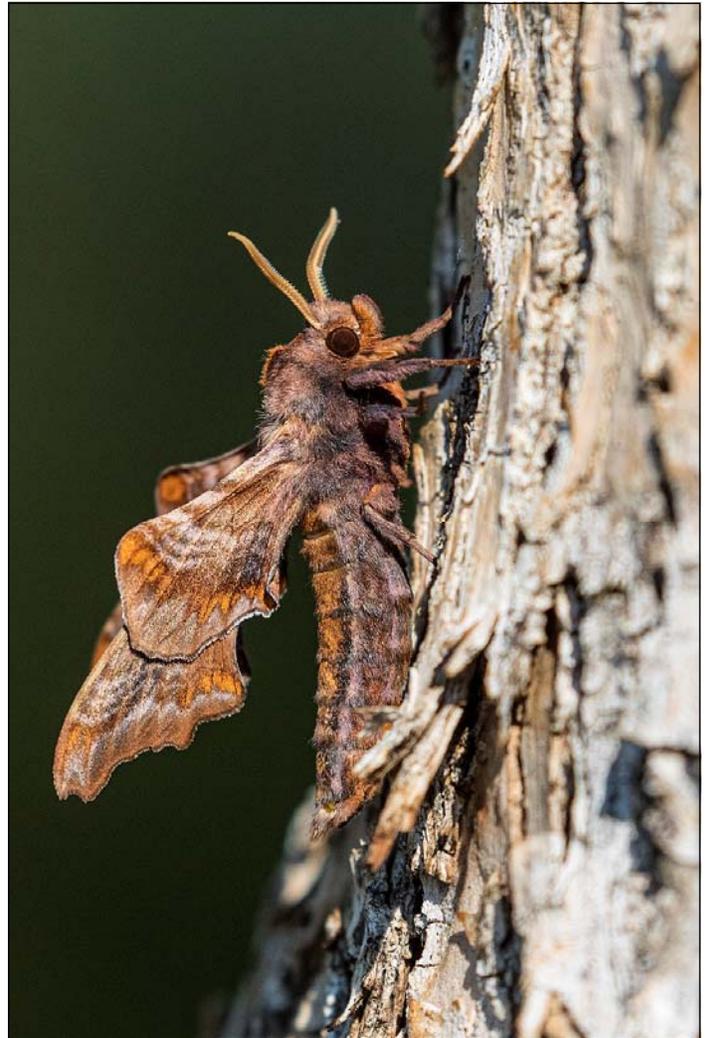
We spent the night checking out the moth sheet and enjoying the campfire before everyone crashed around 2 a.m.

Just as we were settling into our tent we heard a sudden strange sound. Whup, whup, whup! Before either of us could say "What's that?", our tent was being pelted full force by the spray from a sprinkler. Amazingly, we stayed dry, but found out in the morning that one other tenter was not so lucky and needed to get up, pull stakes, and move his tent in the middle of the night.

Saturday morning we got a look at a couple of big moths that had been live-trapped overnight. Before they were released we posed the Small-eyed Sphinx moth on a tree for photos. After the photographers finished and backed off, a robin surprised us when it swooped in and snapped up the moth for breakfast!

Then three of us birders ventured away on our own for awhile. We wanted a chance to pick up a few southern Alberta birds while we were down in that country. We went over to Strathcona Island Park, but dipped on both main targets: Lazuli Bunting and Yellow-breasted Chat.

A bunch of us met for a scheduled butterfly walk at Kin Coulee Park. After the walk we crazy birders buzzed down to Cypress Hills. There we were lucky to spot a couple of big birds crossing the road in front of our car. It was exciting to see them, especially for Grace, who jumped out to get pictures of her Lifer Wild Turkeys!



*Small-eyed Sphinx moth (above), American Robin with "breakfast" (below),*

*Photos by Gerald Romanchuk*



**Wild Turkeys, Photo by Grace Kwong**

After a delicious group dinner at The Hat restaurant we all went over to Police Point Park, where our hosts had arranged special permission to set up moth sheets. Some really cool species showed up, including a couple of different Tiger Moths and a big Sphinx – the Spurge Hawk-moth.

At the end of a long day of butterflies, birds, and moths, some people started to run out of steam.

Back at the camp we thought there'd be time for a few beverages and some star-gazing before the sprinklers went off. But we were fooled a second time because they started earlier than the night before and sent us scrambling to our tents for cover. Our tent was still on the grass, but luckily it stayed dry again despite the campground's best attempts at giving us a good soaking!

Sunday morning we tried two more spots for our target birds, but still came up empty. After taking down camp we followed a few folks heading to the Redcliff River Valley Park to see termites in their natural habitat. It was neat to see them when Lisa Lumley and Hilary Pittel pointed out the tiny white insects crawling around in a log. We really enjoyed the park and found birds including Lark Sparrow, Rock Wren, and Violet-green Swallow. And finally we got our Lazuli Bunting!

The ALG is a fun and generous group of awesome people. We enjoyed good company, saw lots of uniquely cool moths, and even squeezed in a few birds.

**Colleen Raymond and Gerald Romanchuk**

*More photos on page 18*



**Grace Kwong, Photo by Colleen Raymond**



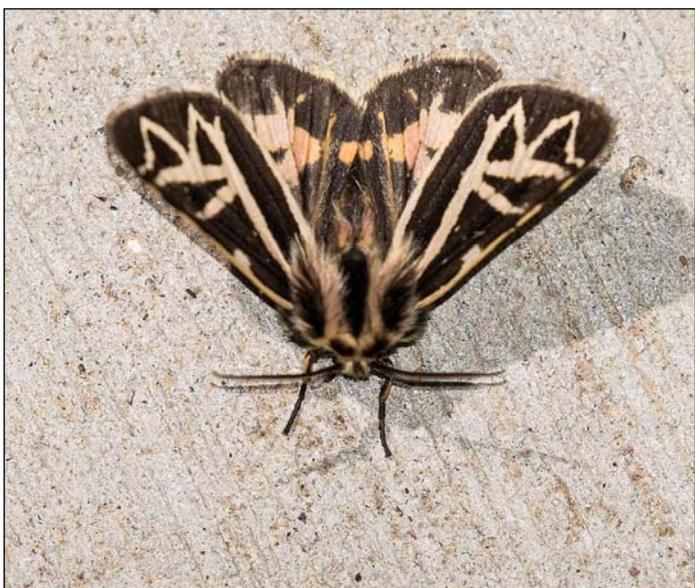
**Hilary Pittel and Lisa Lumley, Photo by Greg Pohl**



*Lazuli Bunting, Photo by Grace Kwong*

*“At the end of a long day of butterflies, birds, and moths, some people started to run out of steam.”*

*Photo of Gerald by Colleen Raymond*



*Williams' Tiger Moth*



*Half-yellow Moth*

*Moth Photos by Gerald Romanchuk*

## Summary of 2019 Plant ID Walks

Thirteen official Plant ID Walks were held in spring/summer 2019. There were also at least three unofficial ones. The walks were publicized on the ENC website, on my “plant email lists,” by the Edmonton Native Plant Society, and sometimes in local newspapers. Generally, the announcements were made about 2 weeks ahead of time, although there were some short-notice walks and one postponement (Gibbons).

Destinations were generally within an hour’s drive from Edmonton at city parks, provincial natural areas, and municipal reserves. Times varied considerably: weekdays, weekends, mornings, afternoons, and evenings, quite a haphazard approach. I’m not sure whether this will be changed in future years.

Attendance ranged from a low of one (!) to a high of 23. The low of one was caused by blizzard-like conditions in Edmonton, while the high of 23 went to the Gibbons Badlands Prairie, with its iconic growth of Prickly Pear Cactus. On average there were ten participants (not counting the low of one) per walk.

Generally, an attempt was made to come up with a complete plant list, based largely on Patsy and Manna’s expertise and diligence, although wildflowers with colourful blooms always attracted most of the attention.

Reports have been prepared for all walks except numbers 6 and 7, the May Species Counts, which are still to come. The reports generally include an overall summary of the highlights, a set of pictures (usually eight), and a comprehensive plant list. The reports are posted on the ENC website under Botany > Plant Field Reports. I’m not sure how many people can find them, and we should find some means to increase exposure.

We plan to continue with the walks next year, possibly organized differently, with an attempt to zero in on particular habitats and plant communities for each trip and other considerations, perhaps based on feedback we’ll receive during the Plant Studies Group talks in the fall/winter season.

**Hubert Taube**

### *Official ENC Plant ID Walks*

1. Whitemud North Tufa Springs
2. NW of Bruderheim NA
3. Bunchberry Meadows CA
4. Halfmoon Lake NA
5. Rainbow Valley, Right Bank
6. Elk Island NP
7. Wagner NA
8. Terwillegar Park
9. Gibbons Badlands Prairie
10. Ft. Saskatchewan Prairie
11. Big Island
12. Ravine, South End of 199 St
13. Riverlot 56 NA, St. Albert

### *Unofficial Walks*

- NW of Bruderheim NA
- Elk Island NP BioBlitz
- Dry Island Buffalo Jump NA



*Tufa Springs at Whitemud Ravine*

*Photo by Hubert Taube*

## ENC City Walk, Field Trip Highlight



Photo by Manna Parseyan

### Bunchberry Meadows, July 11, 2019

This year we checked the bulletin board before we started the walk and after we finished. No bear warnings! We had a good parking lot sighting, with a Mourning Dove coming in and landing in the top of a dead tree. Birds for the most part were quite distant, with very few photo ops. On the other hand, things were excellent for the plant enthusiasts. Several of us bird photographers started to think maybe we should switch to photographing plants. They don't fly away.

Chris Rees and Manna Parseyan

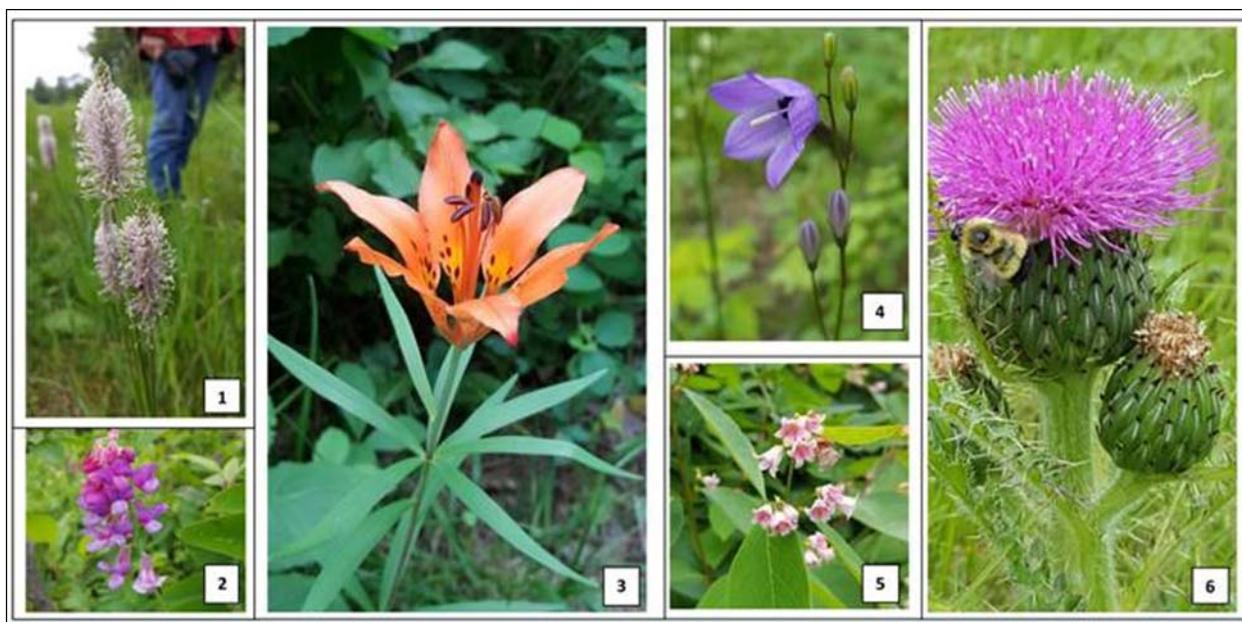


Western Tanager by Vivek Dabral

### Plants of the Week

1. Hoary plantain (*Plantago media*), an attractive plant but non-native
2. Purple peavine (*Lathyrus venosus*)
3. Western wood Lily (*lilium philadelphicum*)
4. Harebell (*Campanula rotundifolia*)
5. Spreading dogbane (*apocynum androsaemifolium*)
6. Drummond's thistle (*Cirsium drummondii*), a biennial or perennial herb, up to 110 cm (44 in.) tall and native to Alberta. Seeds of this thistle are eaten by birds such as the American Goldfinch, Clay-colored Sparrow, Pine Siskin, and Junco. The large flowers and abundant nectar are very attractive to hummingbirds and many species of butterflies, bees, and moths. Many other species use plant parts for food, including the leaves, stems, roots, and flower heads.

Photos below by Manna Parseyan



## Field Trip Reports

### Century Day at Elk Island, June 28, 2019

We ran our annual June trip out to Elk Island in search of 100 species on June 22. Nineteen Nature Club members showed up bright and early at 7 a.m. Our plan was to go to a bunch of places and see a bunch of birds.



**Ruddy Duck, Photo by Emily Gorda**



**Red-necked Grebe, Photo by Emily Gorda**

The morning started off cold and cloudy. We birded our way up the park and had a pretty good morning for thrushes and warblers, with decent looks at Cape May, Black-and-white, and Mourning Warblers. We also heard a Veery, then Hermit and Swainson’s Thrushes. By the time we stopped for lunch the sun came out, things warmed up, and we had 75 species.

We did take a second or two to look at some other winged creatures.

After lunch we picked up a Great Crested Flycatcher on the Amisk Wuche trail. Then we went out the north gate and worked the east perimeter of the park.



**Fritillary Butterfly species (l), Robber Fly species (r)  
Photos by Colleen Raymond**

When we left contact with the park and headed further east we were at 93 birds, a decent number, and there were lots of possibilities for more. We quickly bagged Killdeer, Magpie, Mourning Dove, and the ever elusive House Sparrow and made it to 97. Tension was building and all eyes and ears were keen to find the last 3!

Up ahead on the fence we saw a black bird with white on its back and yellow on the nape. Bobolink!

While looking at that guy we heard a Meadowlark singing. Didn’t even have time to say 99, when a Northern Harrier was spotted for the big number 100!



Then David Grinevitch said, “Isn’t the record 110?” So we continued on for a bit. Stopping at a sedge fen we found a Sedge Wren – crazy, right? We were then kind of surprised to hear 3 or 4 Yellow Rails clicking away in the middle of the afternoon.



**Bobolink, Northern Harrier**  
(bottom 2 photos on previous page)  
Photos by Gerald Romanchuk

By 5:00, we were all running out of steam. We got to 104, still short of the record, but we pulled onto the highway and headed back for the park. Got 2 more birds at 110 km/h – Swainson’s Hawk and Rock Pigeon. We didn’t get the record, but we were all very happy with the day! The handful of us who stayed for a wiener roast picked up one more bird – a drumming Ruffed Grouse.

Thanks to all the keen participants and the photographers, and to Gerald for all the eBirding.

**Gerald Romanchuk**

**Blackfoot Lake Staging Area, June 1, 2019**

The Saturday walk was a productive event for the four of us who made it out for the early smoke-filled morning. It looks like some work was done in the park: new signage and well-groomed paths. We somehow spent 6 hours walking a small fraction of the park, although according to eBird, we did walk 8 km.



**Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Photo by Sean Evans**

We ended up with a respectable 64 species and a pair of mystery gulls. As expected, it was very difficult to spot any of the numerous warblers, vireos, or thrushes that were singing. With leaves to hide behind, singing birds are very difficult to spot when on territory. A safe estimate would be that 80% of the birds were identified by their songs and calls first, with most not seen at all.

With a lot of effort we managed to get a look at an Ovenbird and a Common Yellowthroat. Least Flycatchers and Yellow Warblers were findable due to the high density of each species. They were a constant background sound heard throughout the day. We spent a long time trying to see a Magnolia Warbler that was working its way through the thick foliage. It sounded close at times, but never came into view. Other encounters were brief. A Gray Catbird “meowed” exactly once, and a Canada Warbler sang its turntable-like phrase just a handful of times before disappearing.

A highlight of the day was watching a pair of Horned Grebes build a nest, which looked to be in the early stages of construction. They were collecting and piling up sections of floating greenery along with a rather large branch that they scooped from a beaver lodge. An armada of juvenile Common Goldeneye was a surprise on one of the ponds, as were several Common Loons. This area is generally a good place to observe flycatcher species (other than LEFL), but perhaps it was just a little too early for them.

We noticed this beetle crawling through some horse manure. It looked like it had fresh manure on its head and back, but it was just camouflaged to look filthy. This picture does not show its vicious mandibles, or the glowing yellow tail that gave it an electric look. I believe this is a type of Rove Beetle which eats flies and other insects attracted to waste or rotting flesh. Not the sort of thing I should have picked up, in hindsight. The other insects of note were the mosquitos, which were pretty thick in some areas. I like to think that when they collect my blood, it is used to create mosquito super soldiers, which makes them more tolerable.

**Sean Evans**



**Gold and Brown Rove Beetle (probably),  
Photo by Sean Evans**

### Field Trip to Points East, June 16, 2019

Two keen birders set off on Sunday morning on another ENC Birding Adventure! The initial itinerary got revised: we headed east instead of west. So, we missed the Red-necked Phalaropes at Manawan (Egg) Lake, part of the original itinerary. No worries, though; we had a fantastic day birding.

We zipped out to Tofield, first to the Quarry. Not much there; the water level is still high. We did see some Wilson's Phalaropes, a Willet, Avocets, ducks, and Canada Geese. Then it was off to Francis Point. There we saw a number of House Wrens, which were using the nest boxes along with some Tree Swallows. Along the trail we encountered more House Wrens and swallows, along with Cedar Waxwings, an American Goldfinch, a White-throated Sparrow, and Clay-colored Sparrows.

Then we headed down 626. Along the way we spotted two birds on the barbed wire which were none other than Bobolinks! A Lifer for Hendrik Kruger! We tried to get a little closer but they were skittish and took off. So, we drove to the end of the road and walked around hoping the Bobolinks would be back on the way out. I heard a couple of Common Yellowthroats and we managed to track one down and get a great look at it. We also saw a Cinnamon Teal.



*Cinnamon Teal*

As we headed back, I soon heard that unmistakable chattering song of the Bobolink. We got out of the car and saw one flying over the field displaying and heard a few more in the area. It landed on a nearby tall shrub. We got a stellar view!

Delighted with our sighting of the Bobolink, we headed off down road 626 and saw a pair of Mountain Bluebirds busy catching bugs to feed their young. There were lots of bugs out that day!



*Bobolink*



*Mountain Bluebird*

En route to Amisk Creek Bridge we saw a flying Turkey Vulture, with its unmistakable featherless red head. Three more were perched on the fence as a Bald Eagle flew by. They looked huge, and we had a great close-up view! A total of six of them were feeding on a carcass in the field.



*Turkey Vultures*

We saw a total of 68 species.



*Black Tern*

**Karen Lindsay**

*All Photos by Karen Lindsay*

### **Darwell Area, May 25, 2019**

Eight birders from the Edmonton Nature Club set out for our annual Darwell birding trip. The following day a group of 17 from the Edmonton Area Land Trust came out for a more general nature hike. Both days were sunny and warm for the most part – a bit overcast on Saturday afternoon, but not enough to complain about.

As usual, we met at the Darwell restaurant, proceeded to the Sturgeon River crossing, and went on to the Nature Sanctuary. The non-birding trip on Sunday had fewer stops. On our way on Sunday a few lucky ones among us got to see a “mama” bear with two tiny cubs near the Lily Lake Natural Area. We hiked along the public right-of-way into the sanctuary through some lovely marshy areas, adorned with a spectacular array of marsh marigolds – one hiker mentioned she had never seen so many in one area before.

Both groups proceeded to Anna Lake, where we encountered 7 different duck species and grebes. Missing were the Common Loons seen at this location every year since 2014, but they were seen nesting on Christiaan Lake. Nesting success is dependent on safety from predators, hence nests are always on sedge islands or beaver lodges.

Both hiking groups had a hard time leaving the attractive setting at Anna Lake, but eventually proceeded at a leisurely pace through the rest of the sanctuary. The place was at its finest – well groomed trails (thanks to John Reynolds and his trusty skid steer). The beaver dam break at Adam Lake (torn open in 2017 by heavy rains) had been repaired, and the engineers were captured on film using trail cameras – see picture on page 25. We all had a good first-hand look at the importance of beaver maintaining biodiversity in the sanctuary.



*Beaver repairs on structure torn out during the 2017 floods on Adam Lake*



***Trail camera shot of engineers at work (note two of them)***

Birds were tallied only on May 25. We had a trip total of 61 and a sanctuary total of 51.

Timewise, it was still somewhat early for vireos and warblers; some species were not yet present (e.g., Alder Flycatcher and Philadelphia Vireo). Detailed breeding bird surveys in 2016, 2018, and 2019 give us a clearer picture on numbers and arrival times.

Sean Evans was an excellent guide and kept eBird notes; above all, he has very keen hearing and added significantly to the list.



***Ray Cromie Wetlands along the northern portion of the nature sanctuary. The broad-leaved plant is the bog arum – calla sp. (also known as wild calla, squaw claw, or water arum). Consult Wikipedia for edibility, as it is sometimes poisonous.***



***Diana Stralberg and Marc Parisien with early spring Morel on May 25***



***Birders on the May 26 trip***



***Redstarts are generally seen at the same locations every year. All bird photos were taken at the sanctuary on May 19, 2019.***



*Common Loon on Christiaan Lake*



*Ring-necked Ducks are one of the most common species of waterfowl on the sanctuary ponds.*

**Lu Carbyn**

*All photos by Lu Carbyn*

### **Heritage Marsh, May 12, 2019**

It was a sunny and pleasant morning, a nice day for a walk but not ideal for birding due to the strong winds. Perhaps the nice weather we got over the weekend allowed for a good travel day for the songbirds, as they seemed to have disappeared for the weekend. We had to work pretty hard to get a sparrow or warbler, and didn't really find anything until halfway through the walk.

The first bit of excitement came from a Cooper's Hawk's low fly-by over the water. Unfortunately, unless you were looking in the general direction in which the hawk disappeared into the forest you would have missed it. There were a lot of ducks on the main pond – more than normal in variety, and decent numbers of each. The mix of ducks changes daily in the Heritage Wetlands. Something interesting seems to happen every time I walk the trails.

This day it was a Mallard. As we reached the halfway point, we encountered a Mallard hen with some newly minted ducklings. We counted 14 of them; this is the first group of ducklings on the marsh as far as I can tell. She had been with this group of ducklings for a few days.



*Mallards, Photo by Ted Hogg*

A bit past the Mallards we finally found some sparrows. The wind started to die down and both White-throated and White-crowned Sparrows could be seen and heard. Song Sparrows and Yellow-rumped Warblers were seen in the area as well. One of the resident pairs of Red-necked Grebes always occupies the far end of the man-made pond, and a pair has been incubating at least one egg for a few days now.

After spending some time with the songbirds we headed back towards the bridge. I could hear the ducklings, but was unable to see them...and there is a storm drain connecting one pond to the next. Classic Mallard move to let the ducklings wander into some grating contraption. There was about a 2-foot drop into a concrete box, with a pipe that connects two ponds. All the ducklings were huddled into a corner of the box. There was no way for the ducklings to get back where they came from, and the pipe was pretty long – 3 or 4 metres or so, with a small

diameter. There was little clearance in the pipe, which was half filled with water, mud, and sticks. After a quick assessment, we felt we could safely alleviate the situation and started to fish the ducklings out and return them to the frantic mother.



***Imran, Grace, and Heather hard at work saving Mothers' Day! The hen (upper right) is calling the ducklings over away from the grate. Photo by Sean Evans***

We retrieved all but one duckling from the grating. The last one ran into the pipe, and fortunately managed to make its way out through to the other end. The mother kept calling as she lead the ducklings away, and the lone duckling made a dash across the road to rejoin everybody. Yeah!



***Photo by Ted Hogg***

After a round of high-fives, it was back to the birds. Time to get serious – people had brunches to get to and we were behind in species count. It was a forced march to the far ponds, and shortly after we entered a green space trail, a strange-sounding Robin could be heard calling. I failed to pick up on the Western Tanager, which I blame on my locational bias. I expect to see Tanagers in Elk Island National Park, not in suburbia! Others recognized the call and saw the “yellow bird” fly across a field and out of sight.

There was not a lot of activity initially at the East Ponds. We didn't have too long to wait, though, before an American Bittern flew in and landed in the cattails across from us. It still blends in fairly well, even with 100% of

its body exposed. They always look bigger when they are in open water. This one looks small relative to the cattails it was resting on.



***Photo by Sean Evans***

The bittern was nice enough to land more or less right on top of a Pied-billed Grebe – another good bird!



***Pied-billed Grebe with Canada Geese, Photo by Ted Hogg***

We weren't finished just yet, though; we saw a pair of Green-winged Teals sun-tanning nearby. Suddenly, a pair of Forster's Terns swooped in and put on a show while they dove for minnows and handed them off to one another.



***Forster's Terns, Photo by Sean Evans***

**Sean Evans**

## Global May Big Day of Birding, May 4, 2019

This year, 2019, is the second time we've done a Central Alberta Tour as part of the May Global Big Day of Birding. With a sketchy forecast that kept changing all week, we weren't sure until Saturday morning whether we'd be able to do the tour as planned. As it turned out, the "improved" back roads were in great condition, with only a few minor soft spots. Many of the connecting roads were still impassible, but we easily stayed on high ground. The recent bit of snow meant we weren't traveling in a giant cloud of dust, which is a great benefit when car birding!

Notable were the variety of raptors, the number of Great Horned Owls on nests, and the domination of Lesser Yellowlegs in the shorebird category. Local landowners were friendly when we explained the Global event.



*Swainson's Hawk,  
Photo by Imran Hayat*

Our group of 21 citizen scientists once again started the morning at Coal Lake hoping for diving ducks. They were in short supply, and the highlight here was the flock of Tree Swallows swooping wildly over the cattails while a Peregrine Falcon\* darted around in the background.

(\*Denotes 14 species not recorded by our group in 2018.)

Slowly driving along the north end of Bittern Lake we had a good look at some Rusty Blackbirds\* and found the day's only Solitary Sandpiper. Dabbling ducks were present in the string of small wetlands, with Northern Shoveler the most-seen duck and 3 Cinnamon Teal representing the least-common duck. A Turkey Vulture\* sailed overhead.



*Turkey Vulture, Photo by Ann Carter*

Lyseng Reservoir and area produced good numbers of geese, and some shorebirds.



*One of many Lesser Yellowlegs, Photo by Sean Evans*

At Tillicum Beach the resident Purple Martins were not back but just as we started to move on after lunch, a pair of Caspian Terns\* floated by. Everyone was pretty excited about that!

Heading into the Battle River Scablands we saw the always popular Mountain Bluebirds and Western Meadowlarks along with several raptor species including Prairie Falcon\* and Sharp-shinned Hawk\*. A flock of Horned Larks\* was accompanied by Lapland Longspurs.

Throughout the day cool temperatures just above freezing, combined with an increasingly brisk wind, limited our time outside the vehicles as well as opportunities for clear photos. Several species were hunkered down for stability in the gale.



*Merlin with prey, Photo by Grace Kwong*



**Golden-crowned Kinglet**  
Photo by Imran Hayat

**Western Meadowlark and Yellow-headed Blackbird, Photos by A. Carter**

Along Hwy 53 we encountered Sandhill Cranes, and the fields to the southeast had thousands of them on the ground. We stopped a few times to take in the sight and sound of the flocks. Some individuals were even doing the crane dance. It's always surprising how quickly those long legs walk them away to disappear over a hill!

Heading west we encountered quite a number of American Kestrels and had a quick look at a couple of Hudsonian Godwits, a target species for one of the students. It's a treat to have young participants join us, as their skill, enthusiasm, and keen senses add to the fun. Thanks to the parents who make time to accompany them!



**Sandhill Cranes, Photos by Ann Carter**



**Broad-winged Hawk, Photo by Sean Evans**

Big Knife Provincial Park offered a short walk in a sheltered location. We had nice encounters with Golden-crowned Kinglets, a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker which really lived up to its name, and a circling Broad-winged Hawk\* (Sean's favourite this year).



**Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Photo by Gerald Romanchuk**



**American Kestrel, Photo by Ann Carter**

Rolling into the marina at Rochon Sands Provincial Park, we discovered that the Purple Martins had arrived here. These were the only ones counted in Alberta for the Big Day! Folks were more interested in the birds than having supper, and we added Semipalmated Plover\*, Belted Kingfisher\*, American Pipit\*, and Herring Gull\* to the list, along with some of the deep-water birds we'd been missing. A Marbled Godwit sauntered by, offering a photo op.

We were now in the same situation as last year. Leaving the park at 99 identified species, we couldn't go home yet! On the way to The Narrows Provincial Recreation Area, in the midst of another large flock of Lesser Yellowlegs, our scopes found the 100<sup>th</sup> species of the day, a single Dunlin\*. An excellent find on any day in Alberta, a lifer for some, and the only one counted in AB for the Big Day!

When we reached The Narrows the sunlight was fading. As we listened to the drawn-out squawks of Yellow-headed Blackbirds, a Pied-billed Grebe called from the thick reeds, ending the day with 101 species (same as last year).

The following day, when photos were reviewed, the Scaup we questioned at Rochon Sands were revealed to be Greater Scaup\*, which pushed us to 102 species with well over 7000 individual birds counted (over twice the number from last year). What a great result!

Many thanks to the enthusiastic folks of all ages who joined us for 13+ hours to make the day a success. And thank you to Gerald Romanchuk, who broke the record by scribing all 18 checklists during the day!

**John Jaworski and Ann Carter**



*Marbled Godwit, Photo by Sean Evans*



*Greater Scaup, Photo by Gerald Romanchuk*



*Photos (clockwise)*

*Fungus (top, left), Photo by Colleen Raymond*

*Janos Kovaks and Ted Hogg enjoying lunch (top right), Photo by Gerald Romanchuk*

*Jiri Novak checking fungus (below), Photo by Gerald Romanchuk*

*Miquelon Lake 2 (bottom), Photo by Jiri Kovaks*

*Colourful mushroom (left centre), Photo by Ted Hogg*

**Photos from the Nature Appreciation Weekend**





*Great Horned Owl, Photo by Ludo Bogaert*