

# THE PARKLAND NATURALIST

SEPTEMBER-DECEMBER 2019



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EDMONTON NATURE CLUB

<http://www.edmontonnatureclub.ca>



## Inside this issue

Highlighting Edmonton Nature Club City Walks	2	Beaverhill Lake Snow Goose Festival: History and Renewal	8
President's Message	4	Cooking Lake, 2019: Avocets, Gulls, and Habitat	11
Chickadee Award	6	Conservation Corner: <i>Biodiversity Conservation in Canada: From Theory to Practice</i>	12
Whispers Goodbye	6	Conservation Corner: <i>A Guide to the Canol Heritage</i>	14
The Armchair Naturalist	7	Field Trip Reports	15



**Plant species, ENC City Walk at John E. Poole Wetland, photos by Manna Parseyan**

Photos 1 and 2 show red osier dogwood (*Cornus sericea*). Photos 3 and 4 are of cow parsnip (*Heracleum maximum*), a large plant in the carrot family native to Alberta that typically grows along rivers and streams. Indigenous peoples used cow parsnip as a food source and medicinal plant. Ecologically, it provides vertical structure within moist plant communities, a perch for insect-eating birds, and food for many bird and insect species. Bees, native flies, beetles, and butterflies pollinate its flowers, and it is a larval host for the Anise Swallowtail Butterfly.



**Long-tailed weasel, ENC City Walk at Whitemud Creek North, photo by Chris Rees**

## Highlighting Edmonton Nature Club City Walks

### “Change of Plan” Walk, October 10, 2019

The plan was to walk Whitemud Creek East; however, with all the twitter about a rare bird we headed for the John E. Poole Wetland instead. When we arrived at JEP, we met up with many other local birding enthusiasts. It was only a few minutes before Connor located the Ash-throated Flycatcher. We all had a good look at this first-ever species sighting for Alberta, assuming eBird and the Alberta Bird Record Committee agree it is an Ash-throated Flycatcher (see cover photo by Chris Rees).

Once we were saturated with this sighting, we tried to find the Fox Sparrow in Lacombe Park; unfortunately, that quest was not as successful.

**Chris Rees and Manna Parseyan**

### Whitemud Creek North, October 24, 2019

It was another great fall day, very comfortable for a good walk in the ravine. This week’s highlight was a Long-tailed Weasel that was almost in his winter ermine coat. He was hunting the slope and finally crossed the path in front of us, so we all got some good looks. We also found our first winter species: Pine Grosbeaks, Black-backed Woodpecker, and Brown Creeper. We did not see the Wood Ducks, even though we had asked Wayne to keep them tied up for us.

**Chris Rees and Manna Parseyan**



*Whitemud Creek North, photo by Manna Parseyan*

**On the cover: Ash-throated Flycatcher  
Photo by Chris Rees**

## President's Message, Winter 2019



*Our President, Brian Stephens*

We have had a busy time. Chris Reese has kept the city nature walks going. The transition to winter always creates some walking challenges, but we have had good luck without too much ice on the trails. We visited Whitemud Ravine, Beaumaris Lake, Mill Creek Ravine, Goldbar Park, and Hawrelak Park, and of course participated in the Edmonton Christmas Bird Count. Our weekend field trips have taken us to Bittern Lake, Cross Lake, and Genesee, Keephills, and Wabamun.

Our study groups and monthly speaker series resumed in October. We are learning about bees, fires, the Beaverhill Bird Observatory, the NatureLynx app, Macro-photography of plants, and the birds of Costa Rica. The Birds of Christmas presentation is always an excellent set-up for the Edmonton Christmas Bird Count and the remainder of the winter birding.

The Annual General Meeting in September went well. All executive members are continuing in their roles for the next year. The financial review from our treasurer, Katherine Madro, showed that we continue to be in a strong financial position. This has allowed the ENC to make significant contributions to the Beaverhill Bird

Observatory MOTUS project and to the Edmonton and Area Land Trust Endowment Fund.

We continue to learn about the Important Bird Area (IBA) of Miquelon Lake that we are caretakers for. The program involves doing protocol-driven surveys of the birds. We expect to work in conjunction with the Provincial Park so as not to duplicate effort. The IBA program designed by Nature Canada and managed by Nature Alberta locally is also expanding into monitoring biodiversity of the IBAs. I attended an excellent workshop prepared by Nature Alberta at which the IBA bird protocol was described and two current caretakers of other areas explained their experiences and challenges.

**Brian Stephens**



*Lesser Yellowlegs at Miquelon Lake*

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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)

## Membership

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

### Membership Rates for 2018/19

<b>Household:</b>	<b>\$40.00/year</b>
<b>Students:</b>	<b>\$20.00/year</b>

## 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)

## Chickadee Award



*Hendrik Kruger receives the Chickadee Award from Brian Stephens, photo by Janice Hurlburt*

**Hendrik Kruger** joined the Edmonton Nature Club board as an executive director in 2011. He continues in that position today, meeting all the obligations of an elected official by remaining engaged in helping to guide the club through changes and challenges. Hendrik assists with club documents, ensuring that our written works have clarity of intention. His input continues to be important in maintaining the good health of our club. This is greatly appreciated by board members!

In 2017, Hendrik accepted the position of ENC's Edmonton and Area Land Trust representative. ENC is honoured to have a place on the EALT board and very pleased to have Hendrik working with both groups.

Hendrik is certainly an "unsung hero" who should be recognized for his dedication to the ENC.

## Whispers Goodbye

### *Yesterday*

On an evening stroll around my neighbourhood I walk along a street, like probably hundreds of times before. Suddenly, an unusually beautiful sound draws my attention. I follow the melody – like the song of water rushing through a rocky creek – to a tremendously lovely, giant tree. Rustling in the night breeze, its voice is audible above everything else around me. I realize I've probably never specifically noticed this tree before, though perhaps searched for birds hidden on its branches. But tonight its presence captivates my being. I cross the street to peel a tiny seed-loaded twig from the large, solid trunk and stand a while in wonder, before continuing on my way.

### *Today*

Driving home from work, I feel compelled to look for the tree. But it's gone!

In its place sits a freshly cut stump, surrounded by large chunks of log!

I'm saddened, shocked and amazed all at once.

What a coincidence! Because weather conditions were just so in the right moment, a living tree I passed a hundred times or more, without notice, seemed to reach out and touch me with whispers goodbye.

Or was it hello?

**Colleen Raymond, December 3, 2015**

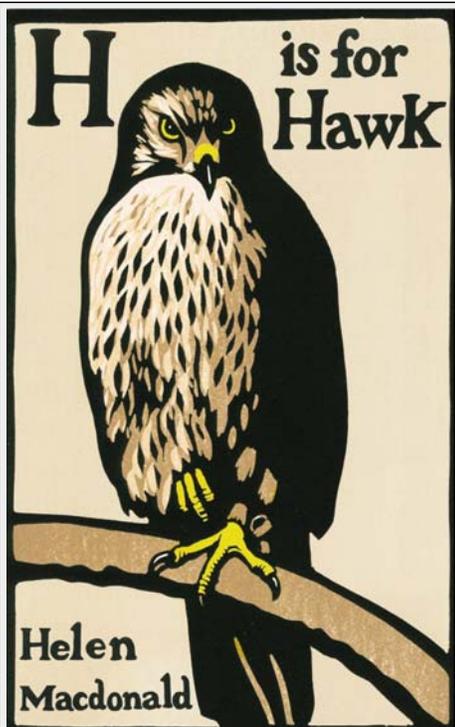


*Samaras (winged seeds) of Manitoba maple, Acer negundo, photo by Colleen Raymond*

## The Armchair Naturalist

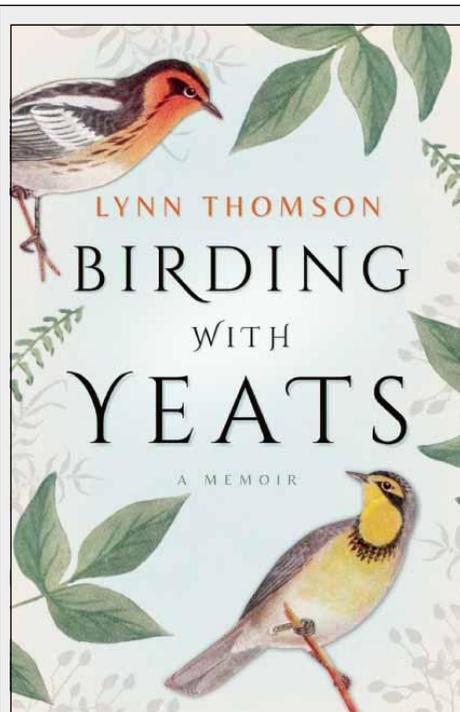
The place where club members review books about natural history they found particularly rewarding. Some of the books recommended may be borrowed from the Edmonton Public Library (EPL). To check availability, go to [epl.ca](http://epl.ca) and click on “Search.”

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.



*H is for Hawk* is a captivating memoir describing the author’s struggle to process the death of her father while at the same time bonding with Mabel, the beloved goshawk she decides to train while grieving. The book provides a thrilling account of what it means to be a falconer. *H is for Hawk* beautifully explores the connections between the natural world and the challenges of being human. While training this magnificent goshawk, the author learns as much about herself as she does about Mabel, and the reader gets a “bird’s-eye view” of life with a goshawk.

*Recommended by Terri Susan Zurbrigg*



*Birding with Yeats: A Mother’s Memoir*, by Lynn Thomson, describes a mother’s birding outings with her young son, and the magic that is the natural world. The author is contemplative and reflective in her detailed descriptions of birding trips to places such as Vancouver Island, the Galapagos, and Point Pelee. A joy to read!

*Recommended by Linda Reuter*

## Beaverhill Lake Snow Goose Festival: History and Renewal

What had 4,000 to 6,000 people searching for thousands of Snow Geese in two days near the town of Tofield, Alberta? The Beaverhill Lake Snow Goose Festival, launched in 1993 and held near the end of April for 10 years.

The festival was established as a celebration of spring bird migration, an opportunity for nature enthusiasts, bird watchers, and interested members of the general public to view many species of birds that stop at and near Beaverhill Lake on their migration northward. This family-oriented celebration provided transportation and tours and hikes around Beaverhill Lake and Beaver County led by naturalist volunteers. In the town of Tofield, a trade fair and numerous activities provided additional options for visitors.

At the time, the Snow Goose Festival was one of the most popular and successful events of its kind in Canada, if not all North America. An estimated 3,400 people attended the first festival, and over 6,000 people participated in its last year (April 20–21, 2002). The festival ran “rain or shine,” but participants generally were richly rewarded by the sight of thousands of Snow Geese and other migratory bird species.

Local leaders and partner organizations involved in establishing the festival included the Town of Tofield, Ducks Unlimited, Canadian Wildlife Service of Environment Canada, Edmonton Natural History Club/Edmonton Bird Club, Alberta Environmental Protection/Fish & Wildlife, Beaverhill Bird Observatory, Beaver County, and Strathcona County, to name a few! Volunteer guides had an orientation manual for background. Local businesses, schools, artisans, nongovernmental organizations, and the general community provided on-site volunteers, concessions, art shows and displays, activities, and financial support for the event. Held in the Tofield arena and curling rink, the trade show featured 40 displays and live music through the weekend.

Sixty bus tours carried 2,200 people on 1.5-, 2-, or 3-hour tours to look for Snow Geese, waterfowl, and other spring birds. Sometimes a brilliant male Western Bluebird was the highlight if spotters could not keep track of moving flocks of geese. Some bus tours started and ended in Edmonton, several of them catering to inner city youth and families that did not have private vehicles to drive to Tofield. Despite the best efforts of guides and drivers, a few busses became stuck in the soft spring roads.

The Beaverhill Bird Observatory led hikes through the

Beaverhill Natural Area that included bird-banding demonstrations and refreshments. The *Tofield Mercury*, the local weekly newspaper, produced a free souvenir program newspaper full of interesting articles as well as orientation for visitors. Some years a banquet was held, with a guest speaker and delicious supper. Major partners included the John Janzen Nature Centre (pre-registrations) and CFRN-TV and the *Edmonton Journal* (media support). From advertising, to event set-up, to provision of tour guides and spotters both before and during the Festival, the partners, their staff, and volunteers were invaluable to the success of the Snow Goose Festival.

Dr. Glen Hvenegaard and his students surveyed over 1,000 participants in the 2000 festival. The majority of them (59%) were from Edmonton, with another 22% from within 25 km of Edmonton. Remarkably, 2% were Canadians from other provinces and 2% were from other countries. In a festival of 5,000, that means 100 people came from outside Alberta and 100 from outside Canada. One lady travelled by bus from Nevada to Edmonton to Tofield to see the geese and enjoy the festival! When she approached one of the organizers for directions and told her story, he took her on a personal tour to ensure that she saw Snow Geese and other birds.

The survey estimated that 5,000 participants injected \$100,000 into the Tofield economy in two days. Because most of them were local, their average expenditure was about \$22 per person. Their reasons for attending were varied, including to learn about geese, to be outdoors, and to enjoy a social outing. Good weather was obviously a key to a successful festival, but with warm buses and lots of indoor activities, the festival was not totally dependent on sunny days in April.

In 1993, when the festival began, there were only 10 such wildlife festivals in North America, and the Snow Goose Festival arguably attracted the largest audience. By 2002, 240 festivals were held across the continent. In 2010, 90 festivals were held in Canada, 22 of them in the three prairie provinces. These festivals offer many benefits to participants, who learn about wildlife biology, conservation, habitat, climate change, and a myriad of other issues.

Years of drought led to reduced water levels in Beaverhill Lake, which in turn resulted in a declining number of birds in the immediate area, longer bus rides to reach them, and fewer accessible viewing sites for this spectacular spring display. Some of the major sponsors withdrew their support of the festival as staff and managers changed. Tofield alone was unable to replace their exper-

tise, which led to the decision to suspend the festival after 2002.

The Edmonton Nature Club, with the leadership of Bob Parsons, continued the spring tradition with their “Snow Goose Chase Tours,” providing guided bus tours for youth and adults from Edmonton. Family-friendly wildlife displays were set up in the Tofield Community Hall on a Saturday. Sponsorships for the buses and volunteer guides were coordinated by the Edmonton Nature Club.

In the spring of 2019, the Edmonton Nature Club did not offer Snow Goose Chase Tours. Nature Alberta’s Nature Kids Program organized a “Celebration of Wildlife” tour of Miquelon Provincial Park and the Beaver Hill UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.

In June 2019, a dozen or so representatives of interested organizations met in the Tofield Council Chambers and agreed to work towards a renewed festival in April 2020. We encourage you to watch for more news, and offer your time and support for this highly anticipated renewal of the festival. With more water in Beaverhill Lake and the spring return of huge Snow Goose flocks, the time is ripe to reintroduce residents of central Alberta and beyond to our spring wildlife festival.

**Vanita Eglauer**, Recreation Coordinator for the Town of Tofield

**Geoff Holroyd**, Chair of the Beaverhill Bird Observatory

*We thank Gerry Beyersbergen and Judy Johnson for comments on an earlier draft of this article.*

### ***The Snow Goose Festival***



***Large flock of Snow Geese, photo by Gerry Beyersbergen***

## Cooking Lake, 2019: Avocets, Gulls, and Habitat

*Annual precipitation was again above the long-term mean, and the water rose into the shoreline vegetation, making it a poor year for sandpipers.*

Still ice-bound on the last day of March, the lake was partially open by April 5. On the 12<sup>th</sup>, there was water as far as the eye could see, a week or so earlier than in 2017 and 2018. Snow run-off added to last year's moderate lake level and pushed the water into the vegetation. In the third week of May, there was a brief build-up of shorebirds east of the sailing club, but the mud flats were soon inundated by frequent rains.

Walking the south shore twice weekly, I was particularly interested in avocets. An advance party of five arrived on April 21, aggressively interacting as if they were already in the mood for pairing up, but it led to nothing. This past spring and summer I saw no evidence at all of avocet nesting. They remained low in number until the end of June, when hundreds, perhaps more than a thousand, were lining the southeast shore. During strong winds, they congregated on the upwind side of the lake. On calm days, they spread out, swimming in deeper water. In addition to their well-known habit of swiping the shallows with their upturned bills, avocets have other ways of foraging. While swimming, they pick up insects from the

surface. Or by up-ending, tail pointing skyward like ducks, they search for food deeper in the water column.

The avocets eagerly congregated at certain points, which no doubt had everything to do with the localized hatching of aquatic invertebrates. Mating swarms of lake flies (chironomid midges) were rare this past season. I recall just one such event, on May 14, which coincided with the arrival of numerous Franklin's Gulls. Instead of hawking for flying insects, these little gulls were usually swimming well off shore and picking up tiny food items from the surface. Perhaps as another indication of scarce food supplies, in contrast to other years, Franklin's Gulls spent little time at the lake. On May 25 and again on July 17, I noted their complete absence. By contrast, the avocets stayed around all summer and fall. I saw the last on October 19. The last date for 2018 was October 20.

A phenomenon of interest was an outbreak of springtails, tiny insects about one millimetre long. In July, millions or billions of these primitive invertebrates were lining the east shore. Sticking together in patches, they looked like blobs of tar or a bad case of oil pollution.

Another notable observation had to do with the breeding colony of large gulls on a stony island a kilometre or so



*Juvenile California Gulls at Cooking Lake, July 20, 2019  
Photo by Don Delaney*

east of the sailing club. The rising lake level reduced the size of the island and led to more crowding. Difficult to count among the stones and boulders, there could well have been over a hundred nesting pairs. All or most of them were Ring-billed Gulls, or so I thought. However, on July 20, Don Delaney and I watched about 75 large juvenile gulls resting on stones by the avocet islet farther east along the south shore. At my request, Don took a photograph, and to our surprise all of these young birds turned out to be California Gulls. A question that comes to mind concerns the kinds of food the adult gulls had brought to their nesting site, to enable the successful fledging of so many chicks.

Hardy and omnivorous, these large gulls often walk along the littoral zone, gingerly picking up tiny food items, probably aquatic insect larvae or other invertebrates. I have also seen them grab voles or ducklings and pounce on small ducks too slow to get out of the way. Flocks of loafing ducks always flush at their approach. During August and early September, huge aggregations of ducks collected at the lake. The easiest to identify, by their large bills, were the Northern Shovelers.

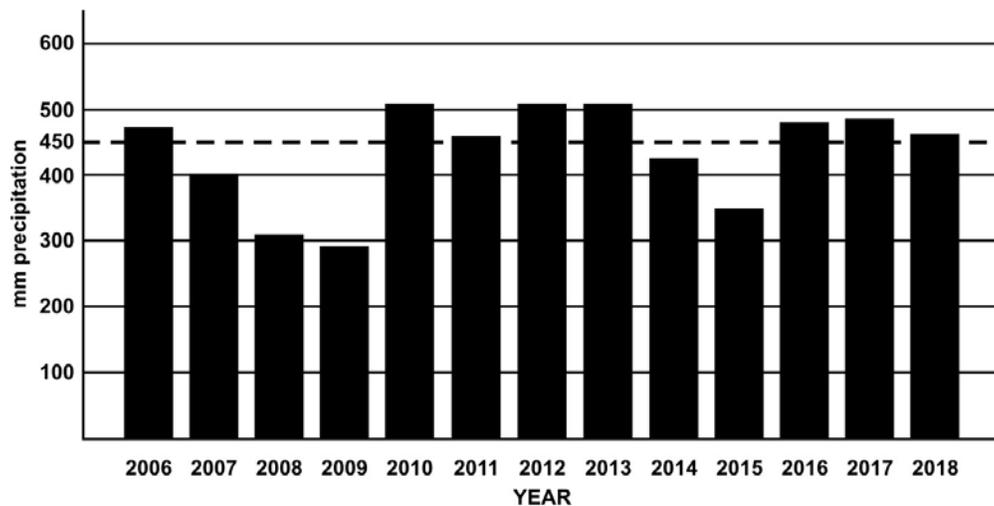
Only once or twice did I see the massed ducks react to a Peregrine or immature Bald Eagle. And in all my hours of watching, I saw only a single Merlin, hurrying low over the grass looking for sparrows, which appeared to be very thinly spread around the lake. Harriers seemed uncommon too, and even crows and ravens were absent most days.

A disappointing and gradually less attractive aspect of birding at Cooking Lake has to do with vegetation and plant succession. During the years of its retreat, the drying lake bottom has grown up in hip-high grasses and thistles. In addition, willows and poplar brush have begun to spread, obscuring more and more of the view of the water.

Despite the recent series of wetter than average years, Cooking Lake is well below its water level of forty or fifty years ago.

**Theodore (Dick) Dekker**

*Graph by Richard Dekker*



The dotted line represents the long-term mean.

## Editorial Notes

Hendrik Kruger recently received the ENC Chickadee Award (see page 6). Congratulations, Hendrik! Well deserved!

Our cover story is highlighting two Edmonton Nature Club (ENC) City Walks led by Chris Rees and Manna Parseyan. Most of the walks are within the City of Edmonton and are about 2–3 hours duration. The popular walks cover all aspects of nature: birds, mammals, plants, and insects.

We had more space for field trip reports in this issue, so I enlarged many of the photos and included some on the back cover pages.

Thank you to all who contributed photos and articles to *The Parkland Naturalist*. The deadline for submissions for the January–April 2020 issue is March 31, 2020.

**Dawne Colwell, Editor**

## Conservation Corner

### Biodiversity Conservation in Canada

From Theory to Practice



Richard R. Schneider

For my column in this issue, I have decided to review two books by local authors who demonstrate lifelong interest and concern for the conservation of our natural environment.

#### ***Biodiversity Conservation in Canada: From Theory to Practice***

By Richard. R. Schneider, 2019. Published by the Canadian Centre for Translational Ecology, Edmonton. \$61. For more information, and to order the book, visit [www.ctce.ca](http://www.ctce.ca).

*Full disclosure: I am not qualified to review this book (its various chapters have been peer-reviewed prior to publication, of course). But though I am guessing that it will not make the New York Times best-seller list, I thought it deserves at least a little local publicity, especially as so many of its examples are taken from Alberta situations!*

Richard Schneider has produced a comprehensive textbook for students of conservation science and a great resource for conservation practitioners, staff and members of ENGOs, naturalists, and indeed the public at large. The book is logically and attractively laid out in 12 chapters, with subheadings for easy reference, and the text is

liberally enlivened with photographs, graphs, maps, charts, and schemas. The use of side bars or “boxes” is particularly helpful in clarifying concepts and providing examples. A glossary of technical terms is also a useful reference tool.

Schneider draws on a broad range of research in the field, resulting in 38 pages of bibliography, each reference with a full title making it easy to select further reading. He himself has considerable personal and professional experience of what he writes; following careers in biological consulting and wildlife epidemiology he turned to biodiversity conservation as executive director of CPAWS’ Northern Alberta chapter. His first book, *Alternative Futures: Alberta’s Boreal Forest at the Crossroads*, on ecosystem-based forest management, was published by the Federation of Alberta Naturalists (now Nature Alberta) in 2002. He is now a senior scientist at the University of Alberta, and has done research on industrial cumulative effects, protected areas selection and design, and woodland caribou recovery. His most recent research is on the ecological effects of climate change.

I’m guessing that of particular interest and enlightenment to naturalists will be the chapter entitled Case Studies, of which six are discussed in detail and all took place in Alberta. A particular concern of mine is that while it is possible to follow an environmental issue while it is controversial, it is difficult to keep track of the consequences after it has dropped off media coverage. In these case studies Schneider follows through, describing the processes involved, and most importantly, analyzing and critiquing the outcomes, providing the reader with otherwise unavailable insights into what was involved and its significance.

The first case study relates the Alberta-Pacific forestry controversy of the late 1980s. This arose when Al-Pac leased almost 10% of the northeastern part of the province’s land base to supply aspen for new pulp mills. In response to the outcry over such extensive appropriation of Crown land, Al-Pac adopted improved forest management practices over the years, thereby setting a trend. Schneider concludes that while the natural abundance and distribution of species will likely not be maintained in the forest management area, the end result will be more natural than with conventional forest practice.

The second case study deals with the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan, an example of regional land-use planning in action. This was particularly interesting to me because Hubert Taube and I attended provincial government meetings on the Biodiversity Management Framework

part of the plan as members of the Stewards of Alberta Protected Areas Association. I remember being out of my depth with all the ecological terminology, the indicators, the triggers to management action, the Marxan (software) models, etc. I also remember being shocked at the discrepancy I perceived between the federal Species at Risk Act (SARA) requirements for woodland caribou sustainability and the likelihood of compliance by the province. Schneider observes that while planning on a regional scale is necessary to deal with the cumulative effects of industrial development, the complexity at this scale makes success elusive.

Although the Surface Water Quality Management Framework achieved good results in managing cumulative water withdrawals and maintaining good flows in the Lower Athabasca River, the Biodiversity Management Framework still has not been released. Schneider considers its main achievement has been the addition of 13,600 km<sup>2</sup> of new protected areas or about 21% of the Lower Athabasca Region. He counters critics' argument that, since these areas contained no fossil fuel deposits there was no threat and therefore no conservation gain, with the observation that these areas are nevertheless protected against other possible future threats such as forestry, ATV use, and mining.

Most of us are familiar with the difficult and possibly intractable problems associated with the recovery of woodland caribou, the subject of the third case study. Schneider will be speaking to the ENC on January 17 on this topic, so I will say no more here. Compared to caribou recovery, the reintroduction of the swift fox (1983–1997) in the southern prairies was relatively easy, although there are still lessons to be learned and uncertainty as to the sustainability of its population in Alberta. The fifth case study, the recovery of walleye, was contributed by local fisheries biologist Mike Sullivan and in particular provides insights into the social dimension of conservation practice and the importance of appropriate consultation in garnering acceptance for a project. The final case study, on reserve design, describes a local initiative to guide the planning of new protected areas in northwestern Alberta; the plan has not been implemented.

Another chapter that the naturalist and indeed the general reader can easily relate to is that on climate change. It is hard enough to maintain biodiversity in a world with burgeoning human populations and a growth economy, but adding climate change to the list of threats brings a whole new level of complexity. Canada, as a high-latitude country, is deeply affected. Some species may gain, and overall biodiversity may increase with warming as grasslands and parkland move northwards into the boreal region, but others, for example, inhabitants of alpine and high Arctic ecosystems, will likely lose. Once again, spe-

cies sensitive to human disturbance will be the most vulnerable. The Burrowing Owl could be expected to benefit from a range extension into newly expanded grasslands, but will need to wait until this happens and meanwhile, with low populations, its range is contracting southwards. Habitat fragmentation and lack of connectivity may present serious barriers to species migration and adaptation, and the greater the warming, the worse the impact will be. Schneider stresses the significance of protected areas in helping species adapt to climate change, and as ecological benchmarks for natural trajectories, as well as of connectivity, which can be enhanced by general landscape measures, movement corridors, and protected areas.

In this chapter, as well as in Chapter 4, “The Scientific Dimension of Conservation,” Schneider refers to the movement known as the “new conservation,” which I have criticized in previous columns in *The Parkland Naturalist*. Its emphasis is on ecosystem services and health rather than ecosystems that support biodiversity; further, novel or hybrid (human-influenced) ecosystems are considered acceptable and “natural,” hence there is no need for conservation action. He writes, “While it is true that we can no longer keep natural systems exactly as they were in the past [given inevitable change, the focus of conservation should be to allow the “natural trajectory of change” rather than “a natural historical state”], this is not grounds for abandoning the fundamental tenets of conservation. The value of biodiversity does not diminish in a warmer world, and protecting species from the deleterious effects of human activities is no less important.”

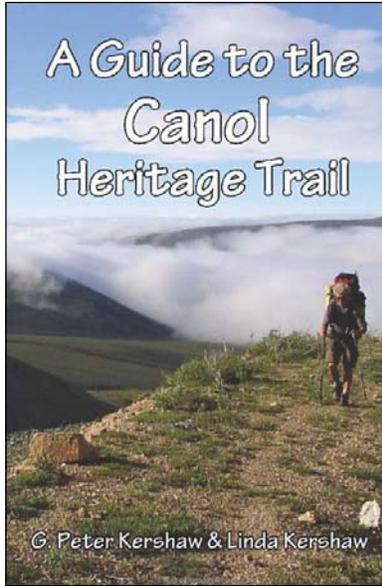
What messages do I think naturalists should take away from this book? One, obviously, is the need for the continued practice of biodiversity conservation, which involves a diverse suite of human experience and skills that should be valued and perpetuated. Public understanding of this need, and support for conservation initiatives, especially in view of funding limitations, can be crucial. Naturalists, particularly, must step up affirmatively, as so many of us conduct our activities in protected areas and want to pass this legacy on to succeeding generations. We can also take away a message of hope. While land-use planning and conservation is clearly messy (I believe “non-linear” would be the technical term) and the best-laid plans can be overturned by government decisions, the data obtained cannot be countermanded, and lessons are always learned. The challenges are formidable in this new endeavor for humanity, countering the effects of the Anthropocene, but there is no doubt we must continue to face them.

**Patsy Cotterill**

## **A Guide to the Canol Heritage Trail**

By G. Peter Kershaw and Linda Kershaw, 2019. It can be purchased through Amazon.ca at a cost of \$32. A set of 20 maps for the trail, at 1:50,000 scale, can be obtained from the Norman Wells Historical Society and will eventually be available online.

This attractive and eminently portable guidebook is a compilation of Peter and Linda Kershaw's multi-year research into and knowledge of the Canol and adjacent areas which span the Northwest Territories and the Yukon at the latitude of Norman Wells.



The trail extends some 372 km (231.3 miles) between Camp Canol, close to Norman Wells in the Northwest Territories, and Mackenzie Pass in the Yukon. It features the spectacular mountain scenery of the Mackenzie Mountains, varied landscapes, and some challenging river crossings. It is the legacy of the CANOL Project in World War II, consisting of a road and pipeline built to convey crude oil to Whitehorse to fuel aircraft in defense of the West Coast and to supplant tanker losses. The road was closed in 1945, in 1965 the Mackenzie/Selwyn Mountains were opened for guided sport hunting, and in 1973 Peter and Linda began their studies into the geomorphology and ecology of the area, including the effects of disturbance in a subarctic environment. They make a good team: Peter, a geographer, did his PhD thesis at the University of Alberta on the long-term ecological consequences of the CANOL Crude Oil Pipeline Project in tundra environments, and Linda, well-known for her popular plant books published by Lone Pine Press, is a botanist and botanical consultant. They have even been joined in recent years by two younger generations of the family; see the photo on page 183!

This guidebook will add great value to the experience of anyone undertaking the trail, in whole or in part, on foot or by bicycle (ATVs are not permitted). Introductory pages cover Aboriginal occupation of the area, history and aftermath of the pipeline route, and subsequent wildlife research and operational activities. The guide portion of the book divides the trail into 15 sections starting at Mile 0 in the Mackenzie River valley and summarizes information on trail conditions, ecology, geology, geo-

morphology, and points of interest. Four colour photos of the trail are provided for each two-page section, with legends that also give the mile number (remember, the road was largely constructed by US engineers!) and date. In subsequent sections photographs (many taken by the authors) and text describe the main landscape or habitat types, 138 plant species (including lichens), 73 common animals, and 30 landforms. As well, there are two pages on fossils. Although the plant photographs are small, they are generally more than adequate to permit identification. Since alpine and arctic ecosystems overlap to a considerable extent, visitors to the Rocky Mountains will also find many of these pictures useful. A map of the trail at the beginning, a section on tips for users in the middle, and a geologic time chart, key to abbreviations, glossary, bibliography and index at the end complete the guide.

My main quibble is that I think the Tips for Users section should have been placed before the section summaries to forestall the reader's initial question of how to reach the trail from main centres, especially as this is not clearly discernible from the map on page 6. (In fact, the trail can be accessed at its eastern end by fly-in or boat to Norman Wells, and by road or chartered aircraft at its western end at Mackenzie Pass.) The Tips section provides much other practical information including on accommodation opportunities, safety, climate, and wildlife. (For lengthy trail hikes, arranging food drops will be necessary, and hikers should have previous backcountry hiking and camping experience.) Other quibbles are that the map on page 6 is too small to be helpful and likewise the geological time chart requires magnification to be readable.

Little space is understandably given to the results of the authors' research on ecosystem recovery since the disturbance: interested readers must turn to Peter Kershaw's numerous papers listed in the bibliography for that. But they note a slow and variable recovery of plant species diversity and ground cover over the years, while recognizing that it will take hundreds of years for full recovery and the ecosystems may never match the original ones. They also observe that wildlife has become scarcer since hunters have cut new trails for ATV access, a situation that must be addressed in the future.

Note: Peter is developing a website at [www.canolheritagetrail.ca](http://www.canolheritagetrail.ca) on which updated information will be posted. The set of maps may also eventually be ordered through this website. To access the Amazon website to order the book, it is necessary to put in authors' information as well as the title.

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## Field Trip Reports

### Genesee, Keephills, and Wabamun, November 16, 2019

We rescheduled this trip from the week before because of heavy snowfall. This week the weather was awesome, but we still had to deal with some icy roads after freezing rain the night before.

Nine of us made it safely out to Genesee Lake. The weather was incredible, sunny, warm, and almost dead calm. The lake was like glass, giving good views of thousands of Canada Geese and Mallards. There were a few other ducks, including 3 species of merganser. We counted 7 Bald Eagles.

Heading up towards the hamlet of Keephills, we navigated some treacherously icy side roads. In the hamlet itself, we had some nice birds – Bohemian Waxwings, Evening Grosbeaks, and a possible Three-toed Woodpecker that slipped away before a positive ID.



*Bohemian Waxwing, photo by Chris Rees*

The Keephills cooling pond was very quiet. Maybe all the ducks were at Genesee? We picked up a few more eagles and watched a young White-tailed Deer swim across one arm of the pond and truck past as if it were on a mission.

Our best birds of the day were at the feeders at Sundance Meadows: Pine Grosbeak, Pine Siskin, a lone White-winged Crossbill, juncos, nuthatches, woodpeckers, and a bunch of chickadees.



*White-tailed deer, photo by Chris Rees*



*Photo by Colleen Raymond*



*White-winged Crossbill, photo by Chris Rees  
(see page 27 for enlargement of the photo)*

A very wise trip co-leader mentioned that we should check all the chickadees. Kurt was listening; he went off a little way and then quietly asked, “What about that one?” It was a Mountain Chickadee! When we got everyone on it, we found that there were three of them.

*continued on next page.*



*Mountain Chickadee, photo by Chris Rees*

Mountain Chickadee is very uncommon this far east. According to eBird, the only other record this close to Edmonton was from January 2005 at the same feeder!

We enjoyed a beautiful day and saw some great birds. Thanks to everyone who came out!

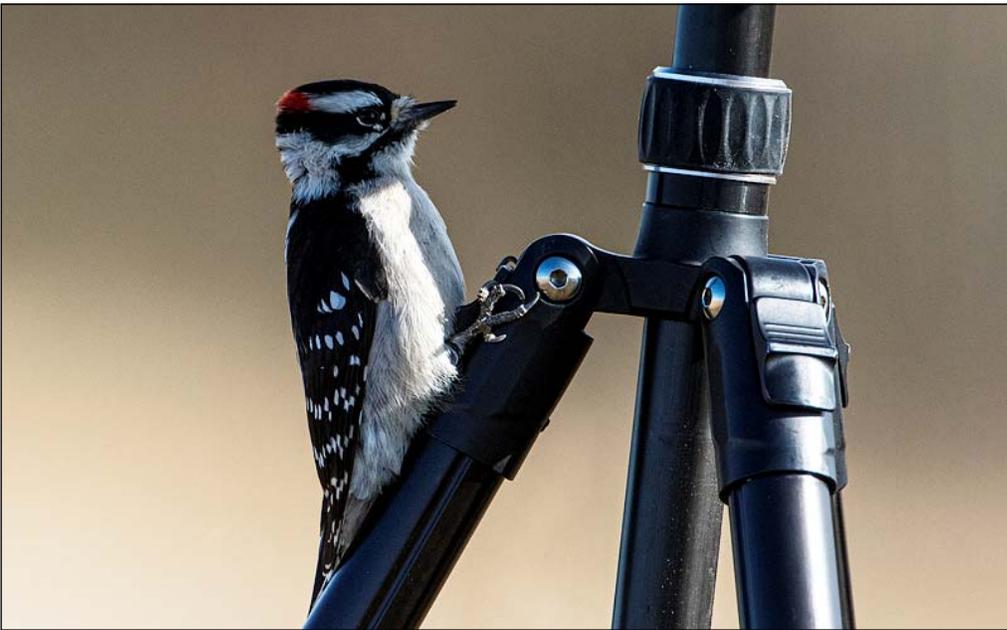
**Colleen Raymond and Gerald Romanchuk**

**Global Big Day SE Loop – Coal and Bittern Lakes,  
October 19, 2019**

Fourteen of us in four vehicles (good carpooling!) headed south from Highway 14 along RR230 on a clear, crisp, and thankfully windless morning. We made several stops, finding numerous Tree Sparrows throughout and a Golden-crowned Kinglet near one farmhouse. South of Rollyview Road we had one of two interesting encounters with a Downy Woodpecker, who after checking out the cars and tires, decided Gerald was worth checking as well, landing on his arm and then torso. Much later in the day, another Downy landed on the side-view mirrors of cars and peeked inside.



*Gerald Romanchuk and friend, photo by Emily Gorda*



*Downy Woodpecker, photo by Gerald Romanchuk*

At the north end of Coal Lake, we had a nice flyby of two Trumpeter Swans. We stopped at various points along the west side of the lake before driving to the south end. A small flock of Snow Geese flew over a couple of times, apparently not sure where they wanted to be. Where Pipestone Creek enters Coal Lake we found Tundra Swans, Hooded Mergansers, and the fuzzy white stuff on the alders that Manna identified as Woolly Alder Aphids. Emily took a macro shot of the very small aphids.



*Calcite crystals and fossil shell, photos by Jiri Novak*



*Woolly Alder Aphids, Photo by Emily Gorda*

We ate lunch at the south end of Coal Lake and took a walk through the campground, sighting both Red-winged and Brewer's Blackbirds. Jiri Novaks and Manna gave us a nice geography lesson about the limestone rocks placed to restrict traffic – we learned about calcite intrusions and found fossils in both rocks.

Along the south end of the lake we were looking for Rusty Blackbirds (which we saw) and were surprised by 2 Red-winged Blackbirds.

We moved over towards the south end of Bittern Lake. A couple of kilometres short of RR222 an unusual-looking hawk landed near the road. After quite a few attempts at ID we got out the scope and identified it as a Krider's Red-tailed Hawk.



*Krider's Red-tailed Hawk, photo by Gerald Romanchuk*

The adjacent field (which had been harvested that morning, we later found out) had 25+ ravens, with Red-tailed and Rough-legged Hawks also in the mix. Nearby was a Bald Eagle, and when the kettle of ravens and hawks began to rise, a Golden Eagle joined them as they drifted off to the southeast.

Working our way up RR222 on the west of Bittern Lake we saw Snow Geese on the main lake and spotted a pheasant near the farm houses. Near the north end we found a large number of swans and some shorebirds (dowitchers, snipe, and yellowlegs).

Travelling east along TWP480, we spotted blackbirds, some of which turned out to be Brewer's Blackbirds. We continued on to Lyseng Reservoir and the wetlands to the east but didn't find anything new. We drove back past Miquelon to Rollyview Road, which we followed until the town, and then headed north to a wetland along RR233 before returning to Edmonton.



*Long-billed Dowitchers, photo by Gerald Romanchuk*



*Brewer's Blackbird, photo by Gerald Romanchuk*

### Trip in Memory of Ray Cromie, October 27, 2019

This past Sunday, 14 of us went on a field trip north towards Westlock and Cross Lake in memory of our good friend Ray Cromie, who passed away 4 years ago. Ray was a long-time club member, an expert owl and raptor bander, and all-around awesome guy!

We concentrated on Ray's favourite birds, owls and raptors. Our first raptor of the day was a Rough-legged Hawk near Morinville. North of Westlock, we drove up on a real treat, a Golden Eagle on a fence post right beside the road. It lifted off before any of the "Damn Photographers" could get a shot of anything but tail feathers.



*"Damn Photographers" in action,  
photo by Colleen Raymond*

"Damn Photographers" was one of Ray's favourite phrases. He'd use it whenever a photographer held up progress on an owling trip. He said it with a smile – most of the time! Just recently, Colleen had a conversation with another club member who mentioned how being part of the ENC often means being able to handle some "gentle ribbing." At lunch, as we said a few words about Ray, we talked about how he was the master of gentle teasing. He always did it with his trademark grin.



*Wearing Ray's plaid uniform, photo by Colleen Raymond*

Ray must've been looking out for us when we saw a large gray bird flying across the road northwest of Westlock. We stopped where it had crossed and found a Great Gray Owl hunting in the bush. While having lunch we picked up another cool raptor when a Goshawk went cruising by.

Continuing up towards Cross Lake PP, we saw a few Bald Eagles, Rough-legged and Red-tailed Hawks, and at least 5 Northern Shrikes (raptor wanna-be's). When we scoped Cross Lake we saw lots of diving ducks: Goldeneye, Bufflehead, Common Merganser, Scaup, and White-winged Scoter. A quick walk around the campground was pretty quiet, so we looked at plants and mammals.



*Bunchberry and stiff clubmoss, photo by Manna Parseyan*

*Supplementary information by Steve Knight:* Lu Carbyn and Manna Parseyan noticed something unusual about what we thought at the time was a Mule Deer and two adjacent deer that were White-tailed. Manna noted they appeared to be a momma and two babies, based on behaviour, and Lu suggested the fawns might be hybrids (father was a White-tail). Photos below show a Mule Deer trio from earlier in the day and then the suspect trio.



***Mule Deer, photo by Steve Knight***



***Possible hybrids, photo by Steve Knight***

**TAILS:** Whitetails have a wide, flattened tail that's broad at the base and narrower at the tip. The pure white underside is contrasted by a darker (brown/gray/reddish/black) backside. White-tailed deer tails are considerably longer than mule deer tails and are not surrounded by a large, conspicuous white rump patch like in mule deer.

Mule deer tails are shaped more like a short rope and are usually white on the backside with a distinctive black tip. Some mule deer may have a thin brown stripe down the back of the tail. **Information from:** <https://www.ttha.com/article/tails-of-two-deer/>

Leaving the park and heading towards highway 2, we got lucky with another Great Gray for Ray. It was pretty windy and the owl looked like it was having a real bad-hair day!

Please see an enlargement of this photo on the back cover.



***Great Gray Owl, photo by Gerald Romanchuk***



***Another view of the same Great Gray Owl showing brown feathers on the head, photo by Steve Knight***

We had a really good day despite a cold, blustery wind. Thanks to all those who came out to help remember Ray! Thanks to Colleen Raymond for eBirding.

**Gerald Romanchuk**

### Lu Carbyn Nature Sanctuary, September 28, 2019

We had a nice walk at Darwell Saturday morning. Eleven people made it out despite the near-winter conditions we had this weekend. The parking lot and Sturgeon River were pretty quiet; we didn't get many birds in the early part of the trip. Once we arrived at the right-of-way by the Shires' property we had a really exciting day, however.

To start off, there was a massive group of juncos in the parking lot. We looked for other travelers in with the juncos but could only pick out a single White-throated Sparrow. Next we heard some Snow Geese, which eventually passed over in a traditional V formation, as opposed to the scattered formation one would typically expect. This was the trend for the day, as we saw many flocks of Snow Geese pass through. Only once did we see a loose ball of geese. They seemed to be heading South as efficiently as possible. Unexpectedly, when I was looking at the geese, a bonus group of Wilson's Snipe flew through my field of view. You seldom see distant birds in open sky that you can easily identify. A pair of Trumpeter Swans flew past fairly close to us to round things off!

Making our way towards the Edmonton and Area Land Trust (EALT) border was fairly tame except for a single call from a Canada Jay. More geese and resident birds including Blue Jays and Black-capped Chickadees showed up. Cranes and Ruffed Grouse could also be heard, but we were unable to locate them. We had to navigate through the recently installed "horse gates" designed to keep livestock from getting into the sanctuary. Some people figured out the obstacle faster than others.



**Gerald ends up as bi-catch in a horse fence. Jiri gives him a hand. Photo by Colleen Raymond**

In the sanctuary itself we had some late Swamp Sparrows and a Ruby-crowned Kinglet. Yellow-rumped Warblers were fairly common. Several very unusual birds that called only once or twice will unfortunately remain a mystery. (I suspect some encounters were Ruffed Grouse, but certainly others were songbirds.)



**Fall landscape, photo by Gerald Romanchuk (see p. 27)**

As we progressed through our walk, we saw a few circling hawks, including a Rough-legged Hawk making its way south. A few people saw a small group of Greater White-fronted Geese, which was a first for the sanctuary. Suddenly a fairly close Bald Eagle started calling, and as we watched the eagle soar above us it became apparent that a lot of other birds were using the thermal the eagle had found: 3 Bald Eagles, 2 ravens, a Cooper's Hawk, a Northern Harrier, and what looked to be a Harlan's Red-tailed Hawk were flying together in a tight group. It was amazing!

As we made our way back we traversed a beaver dam with the skill of a newborn moose. Somehow we all made it without getting wet, but it was not for



**Northern Harrier with Bald Eagle higher in the sky, photo by Wayne Oakes**

the faint of heart. Lu described various interactions between beavers and muskrats captured on trail cameras, which were very interesting. Not many ducks were left in the area; highlights were some Ring-necked Ducks and a Hooded Merganser. Buffleheads were the most common duck for the day.



*Photo by Jiri Novaks*

Despite the numerous excellent signs posted throughout the property, most people seemed content to trust their instincts and wonder off in random wrong directions. It was shaping up to be a sequel to the Blair Witch Project, but we eventually made it back in one piece.



*Lu showing some off the trail options and explaining trail upgrades, photo by Gerald Romanchuk*

**Sean Evans**

**Elk Island National Park, September 14, 2019**

Seventeen keen birders were not-so-patiently waiting for the tardy trip leaders to show up at the Elk Island Visitor Center. We were only a couple of minutes late, so I'm not sure what all the pointing at wristwatches was all about!

It was a beautiful calm fall morning for birding. We worked our way up the parkway, picking up Pileated Woodpecker, Kestrel, Sharp-shinned Hawk, etc. We had lots of brown ducks to work on. Some were starting to get their colour back.



*Mallard, photo by Chris Rees*

Scoping those ducks can take birders to different levels:



*Martin Sharp (l) and Kurt Brauner (r), photo by Janice Hurlburt*

Considering how many trips we've done over the years, I can't recall many car breakdowns. But unfortunately, Janice's car stalled as she turned into the Astotin Lake area, and it wouldn't start again. And what are the odds of your phone acting up right after your car dies? Didn't Janice know that Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> was the day before?

Janice insisted that we go on with our day while she waited for a tow. Her passengers quickly jumped ship and the group went on a walk along the Shoreline Trail, but Brian was kind enough to stay with Janice and let her use his phone.

It was a nice walk, lots of routine birds, but nothing crazy. Chris got some good grebe shots.



*Horned Grebes (top) and Pied-billed Grebe (below), photos by Chris Rees*

We got back to the parking lot and saw that Janice was STILL waiting for the tow truck. So we went for a drive out to the northeast perimeter but couldn't find any Wood Ducks. Some birders were still keen, while others ran out of steam.



*Photo by Connor Charchuk*

We got word that the tow truck had finally arrived at Janice's car, so we hurried back to pick up Brian's phone. The afternoon was getting on, and we went to check the west side of Astotin. Got nice looks at some Surf Scoters, a Barrow's Goldeneye, and what seemed like a million Western Grebes. Or maybe

120 (the actual number estimated for eBird). Don't recall ever seeing so many out there. The west side of the lake was covered with 5 species of grebe. Usually the ducks outnumber the grebes, but not this day.



*Photo by Colleen Raymond*

Most folks went home, but four of us stayed at the park for a weiner roast and John Moore found us two more "Great" birds: Blue Heron and Horned Owl.

It ended up as a little-over-a-half-century day, with 66 species. Lots of birds and a beautiful day with a great group. Thanks to all the participants, to Brian for helping Janice, and to Connor for eBirding.

**Colleen Raymond and Gerald Romanchuk**

### Pipestone, Coal Lake, and Bittern Lake Areas, September 7, 2019

On one of our most efficient trips ever, 12 of us packed into 3 cars and cruised southeast. After waiting for the field trip coordinator to show up and then waiting for a wayward car that had missed its turn, we finally got to start birding at Colleen's Secret (Shorebird) Spot just off Airport Road.

We started with a Bald Eagle, millions of brown ducks to puzzle over, a winter grebe, and a HUGE flock of Yellow-headed Blackbirds. A pit stop at the north end of Coal Lake was very quiet. The roads toward Pipestone Creek were a bit birdier: lots of Red-tails, a few Harriers, and a couple of Kestrels.

The main target for the day was EALT's Pipestone Creek property. This is a beautiful spot. The loop trail runs through a nice mixed forest and has several great elevated views of the creek and surrounding landscape.



*Pipestone Creek, photo by Colleen Raymond*



*ENC group, photo by Jiri Novak*

We had a lunch break at one of the viewpoints. It was hard to leave. Flocks of robins, Cedar Waxwings, chickadees, and Yellow-rumped Warblers were moving through below us. Redstarts and Orange-crowned, Yellow, and Wilson's Warblers were also spotted. The highlights had to be a Belted Kingfisher rattling its way down the creek and a Sharp-shinned Hawk that circled over us several times.



*Sharp-shinned Hawk, photo by Connor Charchuk*

The morning started fairly cool, but as we got back towards the cars the sun came out and warmed things up. We even got some of the birders to take a look at butterflies flitting around. A few nice fresh Painted Ladies, Great Spangled Fritillary, Sulphurs, Cabbage Whites, and Common Wood-Nymphs were enjoying the sunshine.



*Painted Lady, photo by Emily Gorda*



*Western White, photo by Emily Gorda*

A big challenge while birding in a group can be giving directions to a bird you spot. Some of the most common things we hear are “It’s right THERE,” or “It’s in THAT tree.” Not usually very helpful! We got a unique set of directions when Sean tried to get us on a bird. We were told to look for a big log. When that didn’t work we were told to look where he was looking. That should’ve been more helpful, but still no one found the bird. As a last resort the instruction was to “look through Connor’s head.” Maybe it doesn’t sound that funny now, but it was pretty humorous at the time.

The campground was pretty active. Not with campers, though. There were quite a few birds! Catbird, wax-wings, Goldfinch, Purple Finch, and a good variety of warblers and sparrows. A flock of Sandhill Cranes was heard and then seen circling overhead.

The afternoon was starting to slip away and we didn’t have time to do much more exploring, but we did run the west and north perimeter roads of Bittern Lake. Someone spotted a Turkey Vulture; when we got out, we saw 3 vultures circling, then with 2 more we had a mini-kettle of 5 overhead. We even added 2 butterflies – Red Admiral and Mourning Cloak.

Up on the northeast corner we saw tons of brown ducks, and most notably a large flock of swallows cruising around and occasionally landing on the fence wires and even on the road. The vast majority were Barn Swallows, but we picked out a handful of Banks and a couple of brownish juvenile Trees.

Turning north we finally picked up a few shorebirds – Greater Yellowlegs, Long-billed Dowitcher, Wilson’s Snipe, and Killdeer – as well as some American Pipits among a flock of Savannah Sparrows.



*Tree Swallow and Barn Swallow,  
photo by Sean Evans*



*Group photo by Colleen Raymond*

It turned out to be a pretty good day with lots of birds. Nothing really unusual, but it was cool to see some very large flocks and a few first-of-fall species. We also got some nice butterflies. A great time was had with a great group of people. Thanks to all the participants!

**Colleen Raymond and Gerald Romanchuk**

### **William Hawrelak and Emily Murphy Parks, August 24, 2019**

We had a beautiful morning walk around William Hawrelak Park and the trail to Emily Murphy Park. We were mainly looking for warblers, and found 11 species among the 39 total species recorded for the morning. Twenty-four of us participated in this field trip.

Along the trail to Emily Murphy Park we witnessed 2 Merlins interacting with a family group of 5 Northern Flickers. Two Pileated Woodpeckers also joined the fray. The action was fast and noisy as they chased each other around. As far as we could tell, no Merlins or woodpeckers were injured.

Thanks to Brian and Sean for keeping track of sightings and reporting to eBird.

**Don Delaney**



*Fall landscape, Lu Carbyn Nature Sanctuary, photo by Gerald Romanchuk*



*White-winged Crossbill, Genesee, Keephills, and Wabamun field trip, photo by Chris Rees*



*Great Gray Owl, photo by Gerald Romanchuk*