

# THE PARKLAND NATURALIST

MAY-AUGUST 2022



A PUBLICATION OF THE  
EDMONTON NATURE CLUB

<http://www.edmontonnatureclub.ca>



## Inside this issue

Magnificent Manitoba	2	Chasing 1500	15
President's Message	6	Birding at Cooking Lake 2022: A Dry Spring with Some Surprises	16
Conservation Corner	8	Observation of Poison Ivy in the Oleskiw Area of West Edmonton	18
Restarting the Outdoor Program	11	An Outbreak of Gray-cheeked Thrushes	20
Armchair Naturalist	14	An Urban Heron Rookery at Jackie Parker Recreation Area	22



*Red-headed Woodpecker, Southwestern Manitoba Mixed-Grass Prairie Preserve, photo by Betty Fisher*  
*Polar Bear with cub, Hudson Bay, photo by Judy Johnson*



## Magnificent Manitoba

Manitoba is one of the three Prairie Provinces, but its diversity of ecosystems is not limited to prairie. In the north you have tundra, and as you move south you find boreal forest, aspen parkland, and a vast lake and wetland system before getting to the southern prairies, which are now mostly farmland except for protected prairie areas. The province of Manitoba is the longitudinal centre of Canada and the centre of the Hudson Bay drainage area. The southern part of the province is on the remains of glacial Lake Agassiz, a large fertile flood plain in the Red River Valley. The receding glaciers left rolling hills and rock in some areas, especially the Lake Agassiz escarpment in Riding Mountain National Park. The province is diverse in landscape, ecosystems, and bird and mammal life, and for this reason the Eagle-Eye Tours' "Belugas, Bears & Birds" trip sounded appealing. Betty Fisher, Judy Johnson, Hil Reine, and I joined four others on this great tour. We started in Winnipeg, the capital of the province with a population of about 750,000 and the seventh largest city in Canada.

Like most bird trips, our days began with a 6 a.m. start for most of the 10-day tour. We ventured out the first day to Riding Mountain National Park and stopped for breakfast at Manitoba Lake, one of the province's three largest lakes. St. Ambrose Beach and the surrounding marsh provided half a day of excellent birding with lots of marsh species – Yellow-throats, Sora and Virginia Rails, Marbled Godwits (sitting on utility poles!), snipes, bitterns, Swamp Sparrows, three species of terns, and a nesting colony of Double-crested Cormorants and White Pelicans.



*Virginia Rail, photo by Betty Fisher*

After breakfast we visited a landfill – what is a bird trip without a landfill or sewage lagoon! We saw lots of Ring-billed, Herring, and Franklin's Gulls and one lone Lesser Black-backed Gull – a good find.

We travelled up to the east side of Riding Mountain but could not go through the park, as the road was flooded, so we birded around the area with lots of Meadowlarks, Tree Swallows, Mourning Doves, all the blackbirds, and Turkey Vultures. At the end of the afternoon we were rewarded with a mother Black Bear and two cubs. After observing them for a while, we drove into the edge of the park, where another Black Bear had just been hazed by the rangers to get it out of the entrance area. On the way to our hotel we saw another bear run along the ditch.



*Black bear with cubs, photo by Betty Fisher*

In the evening we went searching for a Great Gray Owl but found a Short-eared Owl, two coyotes, a beaver, a heron, and three loons, not bad for an hour's drive!

Our guide, Ken De Smet, was very good and could hear almost anything except us talking in the van. Ken was determined to find as many birds as possible and as many beasts as possible, as three participants were not birders. He did a great job on both fronts.

We spent two nights at Riding Mountain NP and visited Clear Lake for a hike as well as the boreal walk. Several warblers were still around and Swainson's and Hermit Thrushes were calling. Warbling, Blue-headed, and Red-eyed Vireos were seen and heard. Most birds were now feeding young and not always singing. The waterfowl had numerous young, and loon babies were on their mom's back. The highlight of an early evening trip was seeing a very cooperative Great Gray Owl. The park also

### On the Cover:

*Moose, Riding Mountain National Park, photo by Marg Reine*

provided very good beast sightings: a Red Fox, a Moose, and more Black Bears with cubs.



**Wet Red Fox, photo by Marg Reine**

From Riding Mountain NP, we went to the Southwestern Manitoba Mixed-Grass Prairie Preserve near Melita, the Whitewater Lake Wildlife Management Area (WMA), Broomhill WMA, and Pierson WMA. Described in the *Manitoba Grasslands Birding Trail Guide*, which can be downloaded from the Town of Melita website, these areas abound with prairie bird species. We have never seen as many Upland Sandpipers before; one evening we counted 27 during a two-hour drive. They were sitting on fences, wires, poles, and on the edge of the road. We saw a small number of young as well. Also in abundance were both Eastern and Western Kingbirds, all the swallows except Cave, Mourning Doves (hundreds), and Western Meadowlarks singing everywhere.

This area yielded many species of sparrows, Chestnut-collared Longspurs, Bobolinks, Dickcissels, large flocks of Brewer's Blackbirds, Red-winged Blackbirds, and Brown-headed Cowbirds (in the hundreds).

Raptors were abundant. Red-tailed, Broad-winged, Swainson's, and Ferruginous Hawks, Turkey Vultures, Burrowing Owls, Short-eared Owls, and Great-horned Owl, as well as numerous Northern Harriers, Kestrels, and Merlins were all spotted throughout the tour. Kestrels were seen more often than we see them around the Edmonton area now.

We were also lucky enough to see Sharp-tailed Grouse, Gray Partridge, and Ruffed Grouse, all running along the ditches. We often saw Wild Turkeys as well.

Red-headed Woodpeckers were a highlight for some and Western and Mountain Bluebirds are always interesting to spot. We saw most of the waterfowl on the vast

number of marshes in the Minnedosa pothole area, which is one of the North American hot spots for breeding waterfowl. There is an almost unbelievable amount of water, and lots of mosquitoes to go with it!

After five days in the forested and prairie habitats, we flew to the town of Churchill on Hudson Bay. During three days on the tundra and bay, our goal was to find beasts, but we still sought birds, of course.

The next morning we boarded a zodiac and followed Churchill River to Hudson Bay to find hundreds of Belugas. White adults and grey calves were swimming in pods close to the boat while feeding on capelin, a small smelt. We put a microphone into the water to hear the great variety of sounds made as they communicate with each other. Beluga are mid-sized whales; males are about 5.5 metres long and weigh 1400 kilograms, and females are around 4.6 metres long and weigh about 1200 kilograms. Approximately half of a Beluga's weight consists of fat, including an outer layer about 15 cm thick that provides great insulation in the cold Arctic waters. The whales come into the mouth of the Churchill River to calve, so the young are around for most of the summer. Fortunately for us, Hudson Bay was calm; the water is clearer in the bay than in the river, so we could see them more easily. Around 3000 to 4000 Belugas were in the area.

On the same trip we went near an island where a Polar Bear was feeding on a whale that had washed ashore. It was interesting to watch how this bear was pulling flesh off the well-rotted carcass. Further along the shore we saw three more bears, including a mom and cub playing in the water. The next day we took another zodiac trip. This time the mom and cub were feeding on the carcass and the other two were swimming in the water. One young male came a little too close for mom's liking, so a small skirmish occurred. After playing in the water and snarling at each other, they climbed out on the rocks for a rest.

Polar Bears come to the edge of Hudson Bay when the ice leaves. They follow the the shoreline, relaxing, moving east, waiting until the ice floes return in November and they can go out onto the ice for the winter. Fall is when the most bears are present around Churchill. Warning signs are all over town, especially near the shore area where you cannot walk. Twice while we were there Parks Canada people were hazing the mom and cub away from the Cape Merry peninsula near town. They use a horn and shots in the air to condition the bears to stay away from humans, much like Grizzly Bear hazing in the Kananaskis. These great beasts were a delight to see and watch.



*Mom and cub playing in the water and young male retreating, photo by Marg Reine*

While in the boat we also saw Bearded and Ringed Seals, lots of Arctic Terns feeding, and Parasitic Jaegers trying to steal their food. Bald Eagles were sitting along the shoreline – out on a lone rock they look big, but even in bogs in the valleys they were easy to spot. We saw 11 Bald Eagles in various stages of plumage.

Little Gulls, Bonaparte's Gulls, Herring Gulls, and Arctic and Common Terns were prominent on the water bodies. When the tide was out the mud flats were covered with shorebirds. We found Whimbrels, Hudsonian Godwits, Stilt and Pectoral Sandpipers, Short-billed Dowitchers, Red-necked Phalarope, and Sanderlings, as well as Baird's, Buff-breasted, Semi-palmated, and Least Sandpipers and both yellowlegs. We saw a Sandhill Crane pair with two colts.

Early in the mornings we found the shorebirds as well as Pine Grosbeaks, Redpolls, Rusty Blackbirds, and numerous Ravens. A couple of the lakes had pairs of Pacific Loons with chicks.

While scouting the landscape one morning we saw Parasitic Jaegers (about six), including two pairs near a nest area. One pair was chasing away a Canada Goose family and being very aggressive, an interesting encounter to watch.

The area around Churchill has Hudson Bay and many rivers that empty into it, as well as outcroppings of the Canadian Shield and lots of marshes and bogs that are

perfect breeding grounds for migrant birds and hordes of mosquitoes and super-large horseflies.

Even though it was a bird and beast trip, I think leaving out the blooms would be remiss and wish we had more time to explore some of the bogs and marshy areas. The flowering plants some of us had a chance to observe in Churchill included Arctic Wintergreen, Northern Hedysarum, Purple Paint Brush, Early Yellow Locoweed, Stemless Raspberry, Mountain Avens, Three-toothed Saxifrage, Alpine Arnica, and, of course, Labrador Tea and lots of Reindeer Lichen, Starburst Lichen, and Rock Tripe. The prairies were also in flower but hard to observe from the van.

The trip was enjoyed by all, and the landscapes we experienced were varied and fruitful for birds, beasts, and blooms. The accommodations were comfortable and clean, and some even had better than the usual hotel breakfasts. Evening meals were great, as Ken usually found good restaurants. For those interested in the numbers, we saw 221 species of birds and 12 species of mammals, with exceptionally good opportunities to observe the behaviour of the mammals.

If you want to see a great variety of species and are willing to spend long days that start very early, you will enjoy this trip.

**Marg Reine**

## President's Message



*Our President, Brian Stephens*

*Moth photos by Brian Stephens  
ID by iNaturalist*



*Gray Dagger*



*Dysstroma*

The club had a busy spring and early summer. We were able to join with Nature Calgary to run a Birding 101 program, an excellent four-part series via Zoom on bird identification. We held a city walk after each of these and ran several more local walks from May through August.

The Bird-Friendly City Team completed and submitted our initial application, which was successful in obtaining entry-level status. The team comprised representatives from Edmonton Nature Club, Nature Alberta, Edmonton and Area Land Trust, Beaver Hill Bird Observatory, and North Saskatchewan River Valley Conservation Society, with help and support from Wild Bird General Store, Wild Birds Unlimited, and Wild North. We obtained an endorsement from the mayor. The process of completing the application revealed a number of areas of strength and weakness. It also made clear that areas of strength have taken years to develop and are frequently at risk from challenges, especially to habitat.

We have completed the development of a short list of nominees for the City Bird of Edmonton: Blue Jay, Ghost Magpie, Pileated Woodpecker, Red-breasted Nuthatch, and Waxwing (both Cedar and Bohemian, as a single choice). This list will be forwarded to City Council to implement city-wide voting.

Club members have participated in several biodiversity events, collecting information about plant, insect, and bird species in the Edmonton area.

I hope everyone is getting out and enjoying plants, bugs, and birds!

**Brian Stephens**

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

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

Executive Director – **Karen Lindsay**  
[kdlinds@telus.net](mailto:kdlinds@telus.net)

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

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

## Membership

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

### Membership Rates for 2020/2021

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

## Appointed Board Members

### Program

Indoor Program Director – **Alana Tollenaar**  
[alana.tollenaar@gmail.com](mailto:alana.tollenaar@gmail.com)

Outdoor Program Directors – **Janice Hurlburt and Chris Rees**  
[janicehurlburt53@gmail.com](mailto:janicehurlburt53@gmail.com)  
[csrees@shaw.ca](mailto:csrees@shaw.ca)

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

Bug and Spider Studies – **vacant**

Plant Studies – **Patsy Cotterill and Hubert Taube**  
[nutmeg@telus.net](mailto:nutmeg@telus.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 – **vacant**

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)

## Conservation Corner

*This column discusses three topics of particular interest to members of the Edmonton Nature Club: trails in the North Saskatchewan River valley, Big Island Provincial Park, and the pond at Acheson Field.*

### River Valley Trails

In June, City Council passed a two-part motion relating to the use of river valley trails. The first part authorized the Edmonton Mountain Bike Alliance (EMBA) to continue to maintain (and, by implication, use) existing natural surface trails until a river valley trails strategy could be worked out, including on-the-ground assessments, via the River Valley Parks Master Plan. The second part asked for funding for the trails strategy to be included in the 2023–2026 budget cycle. The strategy would be developed in consultation with stakeholders and the public.

At first glance, it seemed quite reasonable, maintaining the status quo until a better system was in place, especially for a city that wants to keep all its residents happy and that is heavily pro-recreation in the river valley. Edmonton is also a city that lacks resources to maintain and police these trails, so groups that can look after their own recreational needs and do some of the city's work for it are likely to find favour.

### Preservation Areas

However, it turns out that part one of the motion was something of a concession to EMBA. Some of the latter's trails (we don't know how many; these kinds of details are not readily available to the public) are in Preservation Areas, the highest category of protected land use in the river valley, according to the Ribbon of Green policy. The prescriptions for these areas are limited human use, including no dogs or bicycles. EMBA's excuse for such trails was that they were following the regulations of the Ribbon of Green dating back to 1992, which referred only to the central part of the river valley, not the updated classifications in the Ribbon of Green 2020, which extended to cover the remaining southwest and northeast portions of the river valley. The 2020 updated classifications have indeed not been ratified but, upon being questioned by a councillor, a City manager indicated that they were being put into practice. See [https://www.edmonton.ca/city\\_government/initiatives\\_innovation/ribbon-of-green-sw-ne](https://www.edmonton.ca/city_government/initiatives_innovation/ribbon-of-green-sw-ne).

In passing this motion, then, the City has given official sanction to the use of trails that were previously unauthorized. The significance of this, of course, is not just a step backwards for conservation, but that it will put

EMBA in a much stronger position when it comes to negotiating the trails strategy. Possession is nine-tenths of the law!

### Huge Network of Natural Surface Trails

Conservationists do not deny that mountain bikers should have access to a trail system in the river valley. But they have raised a hue and cry against the huge footprint of "natural surface" trails now existing in the valley and ravines, a vast network in which many trails traverse steep escarpments in close proximity, scarring the landscape, removing vegetation, fragmenting habitat, disturbing wildlife and wildlife movement, and causing run-off and erosion. For various reasons, the City has turned a blind eye to this increasing riverine sprawl. Conservation groups have suggested that many of these trails, whether EMBA-constructed or built independently by "rogue" bikers, or indeed by other users, should be closed off and rehabilitated as a matter of urgency.

### Public Input Required

It looks as though money will be forthcoming for the trails strategy, and the hijacking of the Ribbon of Green consultations this spring by mountain bikers may have achieved one good thing: throwing a spotlight on the whole problem. EMBA will lobby hard while the strategy is being deliberated, and so will the conservationists, both of whom in political jargon are known as "stakeholders." I do hope the general public, who surely also qualify eminently as stakeholders, will weigh in, too. During the initial consultations over the Ribbon of Green NW + SE in 2018, ENC's Harry Stelfox led a delegation of ecological planners through his favourite ravines, starting at Twin Brooks. He pointed out the sensitive natural areas, and the routes where he thought a trail might be sustainable. We need more people to do that, relative to their own neck of the woods. The next phase of the Ribbon of Green is slated for the fall, but my guess is that, with all the complications, it will be postponed. Consider taking a leaf out of Harry's book, and taking your councillor along on a river valley trip too!

### Big Island Provincial Park

Big Island is a 68-hectare piece of provincially-owned North Saskatchewan River floodplain in southwest Edmonton. It was promised to Edmontonians as a provincial park, which would include a campground, by Jason Kenney during his election campaign of 2018–2019. This raised red flags for conservationists and CPAWS; they thought the area too small and too vulnerable to sustain

the kind of use a provincial park normally receives. The North Saskatchewan River Valley Conservation Society had in fact been promoting for some years a larger area including Big Island and land to the south as a reserve called the Big Island–Woodbend Natural Area. However, the proposal now being publicized calls for a conservation focus for the proposed provincial park, with hiking trails, walk-in land access, boat access, interpretive amenities, and day use areas only. The campground idea has been quietly forgotten. I suspect Alberta Parks ecologists are responsible for this vision, although no doubt City of Edmonton ecological planners are fully on board. The proposal for the Park is available at <https://www.alberta.ca/assets/documents/aep-big-island-establishment-proposal.pdf> and is worth reading.

The park is to be jointly managed by the Alberta government, the City of Edmonton, and the Enoch Cree Nation, in recognition that the area is traditional territory. So far most of the planning has been done by Alberta Parks staff, as befits the current landowner, while Edmonton is responsible for an environmental assessment, and the Enoch Cree are undertaking a study of traditional land use opportunities. ENC naturalists have already contributed natural history data on Big Island with birding and botanizing trips during 2021, access across private land being kindly provided by the Howery family. Edmonton and the Enoch Cree Nation are to be responsible for the park's operation.

### Public Engagement

Online public engagement has been available from June 27 to August 21, and includes a helpful informational webinar. I've been encouraging naturalists and members of the general public to fill in the survey, supporting the conservation model that is being proposed. Public support may be necessary to counter any possible lobbying by the mountain bike community for entry, although whether the flat terrain will interest mountain bikers – at least the steep-hill, thrill-seeking contingent – remains to be seen. Mountain bikers tend to create braided trails or develop their own off-shoots to avoid walkers. Would this be adequately controlled? Frankly, from previous experience, I have little confidence in the City of Edmonton's record as a caretaker of the river valley. As for the Enoch Cree Nation's experience as a manager, this is a complete unknown.

The Edmonton River Valley Conservation Coalition is suggesting that the trails be covered in boardwalks to protect the vegetation. I wouldn't go that far. However, boardwalks are necessary to cross the marsh to view the back channel, which curves crescent-wise around the western perimeter of the floodplain. I suggest that these access points be limited. Boardwalks would also be nec-

essary to access the wetland depressions on site. As for the forested area, consisting very largely of mature balsam poplar, existing trails will likely be used and should be sustainable as natural surface trails.

### Questions?

A number of questions need to be answered and more detail is needed to get a clearer picture of how the park will work. What will the land access be like, given that it is now constrained by private property and steep escarpments that back the floodplain? How will the build-out of the nearby Riverview Area Structure Plan affect the park? Will a stewards' group be important to be the "eyes and ears" of the Park? Under a section in the proposal titled "Tourism and Economic Development" is the statement that the park should "provide economic benefit opportunities for our communities." What is envisaged by this? Why would a provincial park need to make money for someone?

Given that Big Island has received a huge amount of disturbance in the past – lumber harvesting, mining, boatloads of recreationists, ATV riders, and flooding – it is extremely weedy, and will require considerable rehabilitation. Hence I feel the suggestion that the park will be ready for public admission any time soon is totally unrealistic. Rather, let's get the restoration done efficiently and expediently without visitors present, and then have an appropriate and well-organized opening ceremony that stresses ecological integrity and appreciation of the river valley!



**ENC's Hubert Taube exploring a wetland depression in Big Island, July 23, 2021**

I do like the fact that the proposal makes reference to the idea of protection for the Woodbend area to the south, making for a much larger conservation area in the future. It would not be part of the Provincial Park officially, as the land would not be bought by the Province, but other modes of protection could be sought for it – a hopeful vision for this wilder southern segment of our river valley!



**Ledingham's false dragonhead (*Physostegia ledinghamii*), a rare plant found chiefly in North Saskatchewan River habitats, in flower in the marsh, July 23, 2021.**

### **Acheson Field Pond – Reprise**



**Acheson Field Pond on July 13, 2022, showing growth of willows on the west side.**

A few *PN* issues ago I wrote about a sometimes ephemeral pond in a sandy field in the Acheson industrial area in Parkland County, and how I worried every year, as development proceeded, whether it would still exist. I am happy to report it is still there. In fact, it is easier for me to access now, as an asphalt road has been built to the

very edge of the half-kilometre or so of old road allowance that leads to what I call Acheson Field Pond. Of course, accessibility could well be a bad sign, indicating that further development is imminent.



**Clammy hedge-hyssop (*Gratiola neglecta*), an uncommon, low-growing plant of the mid-to-upper shoreline, July 13, 2022. All photos by the author.**

This year, to my delight, the two rare species, Scouler's popcornflower (*Plagiobothrys scouleri* var. *hispidulus*) and clammy hedge-hyssop (*Gratiola neglecta*), were present in abundance, whereas for the last couple of years they have just been hanging on. This supports the truth of my personal aphorism: never judge a wetland by a single year! Unfortunately, the open, muddy shoreline suitable for these species' growth has diminished. The farmer stopped ploughing the west side of the field adjacent to the pond a few years ago and it has now come in with willows which, with their soft ground cover of tickle grass and open arrangement, appear to make perfect sheltering places for deer. In the pond I watch with concern as the spread of large, emergent, colonial species such as cattail and tall sedges, which were not present when I first discovered the pond, reduces the area available for more open-liking shoreline species and likely promotes loss of open water and succession to marsh. However, the inundation we received this June should help slow that process. I wonder, hopefully, how many such gems of ponds lie hidden, appreciated or not, on private land in farmers' fields. I also reflect, pessimistically, how easy it must be for species to become extirpated because of the wide-scale interruption of habitat by human infrastructure.

By the way, the pond is a great place for dragonflies, and this July I could hardly put my foot down without having a shiny, diminutive boreal chorus frog slip away through the undergrowth.

**Patsy Cotterill**

## Restarting the Outdoor Program

Restarting the Outdoor Program as COVID wound down has not gone as smoothly as we hoped. In August 2021, the Alberta government downgraded the COVID pandemic to the status of a seasonal flu. Janice Hurlburt and I put together an Outdoor Program plan for late summer and early winter walks. Unfortunately, we managed to hold only two fall warbler walks before the Delta variant required us to shut down further group activities.

Don Delany led a warbler trip to Hawrelak Park on August 26, 2021, with Brian Stephens as co-leader. The 25 participants, who were split into two groups, observed a total of 41 species, including seven species of warblers.



*Photo by Janice Hurlburt*



*Magnolia Warbler, photo by Daniel Bellands*

Andy Ross led the second warbler trip in St. Albert on August 28, 2021. The 23 participants observed 43 species, including nine species of warblers, between Lacombe Park and the Grey Nuns Spruce Lot.



*Photo by Janice Hurlburt*

Once again, over the winter, Gerry Fox kept members engaged with the Birds of Winter list. This informal activity keeps individuals participating in a common goal. This year we came up a bit short, with only 87 species reported. While this total was lower than in some previous winters, it represents a good effort, considering the extreme weather conditions this year. The most common birds we missed this winter were Northern Pintail, American Wigeon, Green-winged Teal, and Red Cross-bill. A big thank-you to Gerry.

In April we were able to participate in Nature Calgary’s Zoom presentations on Birding 101. Just under 30 people registered, and the ENC held four walks to follow up on each session. These walks were led by Brian Stephens. Despite encountering new snow on the first walk, eight to 12 participants practiced their birding skills at different locations. Thanks to Wayne Oakes, Toby-Anne Reimer, Andy Ross, and Manna Parseyan for helping with these.

On the Global Big Day, May 14, Brian Stephens met up with several ENC members at the John E. Poole wetlands at Big Lake in St. Albert to join Nature Alberta’s celebration. The trail from the viewing platform to the bridge was closed, so, we spent most of our time at the viewing platform and on the boardwalk, finding 31 species.



*Forster's Tern, photo by Janice Hurlburt*

Janice Hurlburt restarted the outdoor program in the spring, and Vincent Cottrell led five Tuesday morning walks in Hermitage Park in May. Over five weeks, 54 participants observed about 70 species.

Brian Stephens led a walk at the Strathcona Wilderness Centre on May 7. The seven participants observed 27 species.



*Photo by Tracy Reaume*



*Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, photo by Tracy Reaume*

Chris Rees led a "little big sit" at the Fort Saskatchewan Gravel Pits on May 7. Approximately 20 participants set up their lawn chairs and observed 42 species.



*Say's Phoebe, photo by Vincent Cottrell*

As part of our Bird Friendly City initiatives, we held our first May Species Count. Over the weekend of May 28 and 29, over 55 people counted birds in an 80 km radius around Edmonton. Collectively, we covered 587 km by walking, biking, and driving while birding for 188 hours. The temperatures ranged from 3 to 20 degrees, depending on time of day and location. Our species total was 189,



*Marbled Godwit, photo by Chris Rees*

including one species – Ruddy Turnstone – that was reported on the count weekend but not shared through eBird. Three additional birds – Red Knot, Connecticut Warbler, and Garganey – were seen during the remainder of the week.



*Garganey and Blue-winged Teal, photo by Karen Lindsay*

Following up on her excellent Zoom presentation, Melissa Penny opened her yard to ENC members with “Birdbaths 101” on July 10. Melissa shared her knowledge about choosing, placing, and cleaning bird baths, as well as suggesting ways to make them more appealing to birds by adding natural features such as stones and sticks. A total of 25 participants were able to explore her yard and ask questions about the many different plant species, as well as the birdbaths.



*Melissa’s birdbaths, photo by Chris Rees*



*Photo by Melissa Penney*

Toby-Anne Reimer led a walk in Mill Creek Ravine on a beautiful morning on July 13 for 13 ENC members. We saw some familiar faces and several new members, two of whom had joined the club only a month earlier. Welcome! Nineteen species were recorded.



*Photo by Janice Hurlburt*

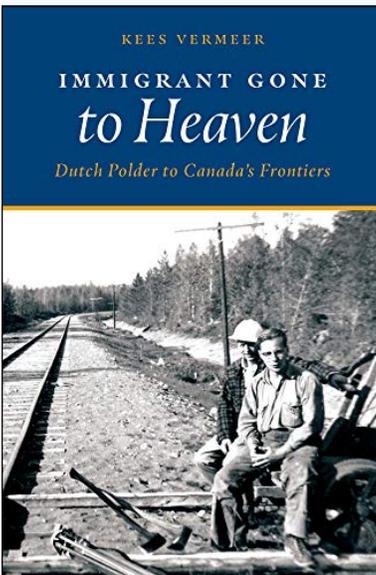
As we are writing this article, another COVID variant is on the horizon. We are discussing how to restart road trips and develop a plan for the fall of 2022.

**Chris Rees and Janice Hurlburt**

## Armchair Naturalist

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

Curl up with one of the recommended books and escape into the wonderful world of nature!



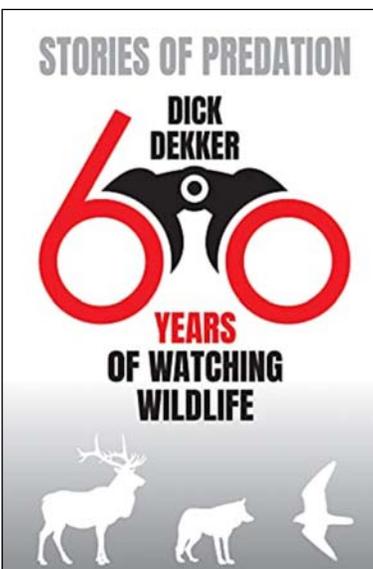
Stories about lifetime accomplishments are often interesting, but especially so for me when they are written by naturalists and biologists. I read two such books recently that deserve to be brought to your attention. Although these two authors share a similar origin in Netherlands, they followed different paths in Canada; one became a research scientist in the federal government, the other followed his dreams as a volunteer researcher. Both made important contributions to our knowledge of birds in western Canada. **Geoff Holroyd**

### *Immigrant Gone to Heaven: Dutch Polder to Canada's Frontiers*

By Kees Vermeer, published by Friesen Press, Victoria, 2021

Having survived the Second World War in Netherlands as a young teenager, Kees Vermeer moved to British Columbia, drawn by the Canadian wilderness. He thought he would be a farmer, but opportunities and his initiative drew him into a career as a research scientist with the Canadian Wildlife Service. This Dutch teenager became a world authority on gulls and seabirds. Much of his research spun off conservation issues, and he conducted pioneering research on oil spills, pesticide contamination of aquatic ecosystems, heavy metals, and road kills.

This autobiography documents Dr. Vermeer's life from early childhood in Netherlands to his establishment of the first offshore seabird research stations in BC, with a long stop to study gulls on the prairies. During that time he met his future wife and lifelong partner Rebecca. The book includes several colour plates of Rebecca, their daughter Lotus, and her grandmothers. This autobiography is very readable and I enjoyed learning about his life, from living under Nazi rule to conservation of marine ecosystems on the west coast of Canada. I recommend the book to all naturalists who want to learn what is possible when a person puts their mind to their life regardless of their background.



### *Stories of Predation: Sixty Years of Watching Wildlife*

By Dick Dekker, published by Hancock House Publishers, Surrey, 2021

A youngster's obsession with watching wildlife can continue into lifelong passion. And that passion can result in an amazing collection of observations and advanced publications. This is the case of Dick Dekker who, like Kees Vermeer, was born in Netherlands and moved to Canada in search of its wilderness and wildlife.

Dick's lifelong observations were focused on wolves and peregrine falcons, hence the title. He made numerous treks in all seasons to sit and watch wolves in Jasper National Park for over half a century. His patience resulted in ground-breaking discoveries about the social and hunting activities of these large predators. Dick has some of the most detailed records of elk, deer, and wolves in the Athabasca and adjacent river valleys.

When he wasn't watching wolves, he was observing the majestic Peregrine Falcons at Beaverhill Lake in the snow-free seasons and Boundary Bay in BC in winter. His publication of his peregrine research, "Hunting Tactics of Peregrine Falcons and other Falcons," was a landmark summary of over 4,000 observations of predation attempts by this aerial predator. Dick places his observations within the current predation literature, drawing inferences from what he has seen and read. This book is for anyone interested in these predators and predation in general, and for anyone wanting to be inspired by what a keen, dedicated observer can accomplish.

### Recommendations by Geoff Holroyd

I am out of book recommendations and am looking for more reviews of good nature books to share! To suggest a book review, go to the ENC website, click on "Member Entrance," and log in using the password you received with your membership. Use "Contact us!" to provide your information, e.g., in the "Comment" section, write "Parkland Naturalist book review," describe the book you'd like to recommend, and I'll get in touch with you.

**Karen Lindsay**

## Chasing 1500

In 2018, eBird challenged birders to submit a checklist a day. I started on this at the beginning of July. In order to make sure there was a checklist every day, I started submitting for my yard as well. Of course, in 2018 and 2019 we had club field trips and walks, but by mid-2020 we were not doing these. I kept up the habit and recently reached 1500 consecutive days.

By checking my yard almost every day after 2019 I encountered a number of true regular birds – those that were present every day, winter and summer. These hard-core birds were Black-billed Magpie, Rock Pigeon, Black-capped Chickadee, and House Sparrow. Nearly every day the yard was visited by White- and Red-breasted Nuthatches, House Finches, and Downy Woodpeckers.

Because I was checking so often, I also spotted some birds that I didn't expect to be in an urban setting, such as Red-breasted Grosbeak, American Goldfinch, and American Tree Sparrow, as well as others that were infrequent.

Also, I could readily see seasonal patterns.

Red-eyed Vireos, Tennessee Warblers, and Yellow Warblers were mostly spring birds. Whether they nested nearby or not, they could be seen and heard through May and June. Except for a single Ovenbird, all the other warblers around the yard were fall birds: Orange-crowned Warbler, American Redstart, Magnolia Warbler, Black-poll Warbler, Palm Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Black-throated Green Warbler, Canada Warbler, and Wilson's Warbler, for a total of 12 warbler species.

Of course, Bohemian Waxwings occurred throughout the winters. Dark-eyed Juncos were much more frequent over the late fall and winter.

Migrant flyovers by Snow Geese, Greater White-fronted Geese, Tundra and Trumpeter Swans, and Sandhill Cranes occurred in both spring and fall.

Raptors tended to be flyovers, with the exception of Merlins and Sharp-shinned Hawks who stopped and hunted in the yard. Recently a Sharp-shinned outwitted the House Sparrows by shooting through the yard (the sparrows all moved abruptly into a lilac) and then circling the house and coming in from the opposite direction to catch a House Sparrow close to the ground under the lilac.

**Brian Stephens**

**MY STATS** WORLD My eBird

---

<p> <b>352</b> Species observed</p>	<p> <b>3,505</b> Complete checklists</p>
<p> <b>12</b> Species with photos</p>	<p> <b>0</b> Species with audio</p>
<p> <b>1,500</b> Days of checklist streak</p>	

## Birding at Cooking Lake in 2022: A Dry Spring with Some Surprises

This is my fourteenth consecutive year of walking a section of Cooking Lake's south shore about once a week from ice break-up to freeze-up. On April 10, the first visit of 2022, sections of the trail were still covered with snowdrifts and there was no sign of open water. The only birds seen were California Gulls flying over their traditional nesting island off the sail club shore. By mid-April, there were a few meltwater pools and some open leads along shore, about one week earlier than last year. On April 24, the temperature rose to 14 degrees and most of the lake was ice-free, several days earlier than last year. The first ducks included Northern Shovelers and a few Mallards, but no Pintails. By contrast, on that same date, Brian Genereux reported hundreds of Pintails and thousands of Snow Geese at Whitford Lake. This accords with the well-known fact that the main migration route of waterfowl lies well east of Cooking Lake.

The arrival of American Avocets appeared to be timely. On April 24 I spotted at least 30 of these iconic waders, and by May 11 the local population had grown to about 200. In addition, there were a few other common waders, such as dowitchers and Lesser Yellowlegs and one each of Marbled and Hudsonian Godwits. Throughout the month of May, small flocks of sandpipers flew by over the water, but I saw no peeps scurrying along the narrow strip of shoreline mud. Perhaps there was little food for them in the riparian zone? I saw similar conditions in 2021, when American Avocets and Franklin's Gulls were

scarce. Last year's spring and fall migrations of shore-birds were duds. This spring turned out to be another disappointment.

Two pairs of Black-necked Stilts were a welcome sight on May 11. Apparently they failed to find the right habitat, for they did not stay long. Again by contrast, Brian Genereux reported hundreds of Black-necked Stilts at Whitford Lake on that date. The local history of these elegant waders is interesting. This southern species was spotted around Beaverhills Lake in 1977, and two pairs nested successfully, a first for Canada (Dekker, 1991, 1998). Since then, Black-necked Stilts have spread and multiplied in the province. This past spring, farmers in southeastern Alberta reported drought conditions, which probably forced their stilts to shift northward. Unfortunately, central Alberta also became quite dry. On May 26, 2022, the total amount of precipitation recorded for the year at the Edmonton International Airport was only 107 mm, compared to 132 mm for that same period in 2021 and 160 mm for 2020.

After last winter's snow run-off, the level of Cooking Lake looked comparable to that of last fall. However, the absence of rain resulted in a dropping water table, especially along the southeast shore when strong easterly winds were blowing. Franklin's Gulls were practically absent during May until they increased to a sudden and incredible maximum on June 5, when I found the south-



*From year to year, depending on the food resource, Cooking Lake's summer population of Franklin's Gulls has varied from near total absence to incredible abundance. There is no evidence of their nesting on this lake. Photo by Don Delaney.*



**Marsh Ragwort is an early colonizer of muddy shorelines around Beaverhill and Cooking Lakes. Its hollow stem collapses later during the summer. Photo by Dick Dekker.**

east shore white with them. Gulls were crowding not only the shallow bay, but also the entire east shore and the open lake as far as I could see through binoculars. My rough estimate was at least two or three thousand, and possibly as many as ten thousand gulls! All appeared to be foraging ravenously. Close by I saw that they were picking up and swallowing small items at a rate of six to ten stabs per second. Rarely have I seen such frantic feeding activity. The big question was, what were they eating? On some May days, when the wind dropped, swarms of tiny midges rose above my head and over the bushes. Additionally, there might have been a recent hatch of springtails. During previous years I had noted widespread patches of dead springtails along the south shore, coating the shallows like an oil spill. According to John Acorn, springtails can be extremely plentiful.

On June 8, the situation looked much the same. A strong east wind was again blowing the water away from shore and there were thousands upon thousands of gulls, as well as some ducks and avocets, far and near. However, the next four or five days brought a drastic change of weather. At home, a bucket placed in my city backyard filled with 120 mm (almost 5 inches) of water.

On June 21, when I returned to the southeast shore, I found the ATV trail flooded and the waterline blocked from view by blooming marsh ragwort plants. The lake was like a mirror. Scanning the water, I did not see a single gull or avocet. After an hour of watching, I left and drove to the Strathcona park in the southwest bend of the lake. There were no other people around, and I sat on a

footstool in the middle of the path, away from the shoreline vegetation. Scanning the lake, I spotted no Franklin's Gulls and only one avocet. After some time, glancing over my shoulder, I discovered that I was being watched by a Red Fox. It made my day.

This past spring reminds me of previous summers when gulls and avocets had built up to very large numbers at the lake although they did not appear to be nesting locally. On my last visit of June 2022, the shores had received even more rain. Grassy depressions were water-filled and the rank vegetation was a veritable jungle, alive with lake flies. From time to time the sky was full of Franklin's Gulls, but I spotted only the odd avocet. A saving grace, and quite puzzling in its own right, was the complete absence of mosquitoes, similar to last year's spring.

### **Dick Dekker**

**Footnote:** The summer continued warm and dry, but lake levels did not drop much. Another surprise was the total absence of Franklin's Gulls and avocets from the entire southeast shores on August 14. In contrast, during each of the past ten years, the after-breeding aggregation of avocets recorded during late August and September was estimated at between one and three thousand.

### *Literature cited*

Dekker, D. 1991, 1998. *Prairie Water: Wildlife at Beaverhills Lake, Alberta*. University of Alberta Press, Edmonton.

## Observation of Poison Ivy in the Oleskiw Area of West Edmonton

When talking about western poison ivy, *Toxicodendron radicans* var. *rydbergii*, to Edmonton residents who have some acquaintance with southern Manitoba, you frequently hear the comment, “Aren’t we lucky that we don’t have poison ivy here?”

An examination of iNaturalist records for Alberta seems to confirm this: prior to 2020 there have been only three records within the City of Edmonton.

This assessment was generally true for myself as well, since I had never seen poison ivy within the city limits until the fall of last year, although I was aware of a population along a trail in Battery Creek, Devon. Now, however, I no longer agree with this evaluation and I feel that the Oleskiw area, in particular the river banks west of the Fort Edmonton footbridge, is a veritable hotbed of this species of concern. I’m very surprised that I haven’t noticed this during all my wanderings through the Oleskiw valley in last 20+ years.

Anyway, I made one observation late last year (2021) and followed it up with further investigations during July 2022. I noticed there is extensive spread all along the Oleskiw slopes: from the uplands near Woodward Crescent, along the gravel track from there into the valley,

and, in particular, an almost continuous spread along a track that I call the Oleskiw Slopes trail.

This trail, running parallel to the gravel trail from the Fort Edmonton footbridge to the Wolf Willow Stairs, was cut into the unstable embankment about two years ago, presumably by a mountain biking group. As with many other dirt trails, it is not known whether this trail is authorized by the City. The question arises whether continuing proliferation of trails contributes to the spread of this and other undesirable plant species. Another question is whether this plant, as a native species, should be removed from trails because of its toxic properties.

The photos are documentations of my Edmonton observations within the last year.

Care should be taken to distinguish western poison ivy from wild sarsaparilla (*Aralia nudicaulis*), a superficially similar plant that may co-occur in woods. The leaves of poison ivy are divided into only three large leaflets (once compound), whereas those of wild sarsaparilla are divided into three segments which are further divided into three to five large leaflets (twice compound), and the fruits of poison ivy are white, whereas those of wild sarsaparilla are purplish black.

**Hubert Taube**

*All photos by Hubert Taube*



*Mature fruit, November 2021*



*“Leaves of three ...,” Oleskiw uplands, July 2022*



*Dense growth, Oleskiw Trail, July 2022*



*Extensive patch along the trail, July 2022*



*Patch with young fruit, July 2022*



*Wild sarsaparilla, often mistaken for poison ivy*

## Editorial Comments

You may have noticed that this issue of *The Parkland Naturalist* is larger than the last few issues. Now that field trips cancelled during the pandemic have resumed, we have more news and pictures to share with you! See “Restarting the Outdoor Program,” beginning on page 11 of this issue. Thank you to our Outdoor Program Directors, Chris Rees and Janice Hurlburt, and all the leaders of the field trips.

Deadline for submissions for the September–December 2022 issue is November 30, 2022. Please email submissions to Dawne Colwell at [colwelld@shaw.ca](mailto:colwelld@shaw.ca)



*Photo by Janice Hurlburt*

We recently learned that Joan Miller passed away in May. Joan was an enthusiastic birder who loved being outdoors, and she and her husband Walt were members of the Edmonton Nature Club. We send our condolences to her family and friends.

# An Outbreak of Gray-cheeked Thrushes



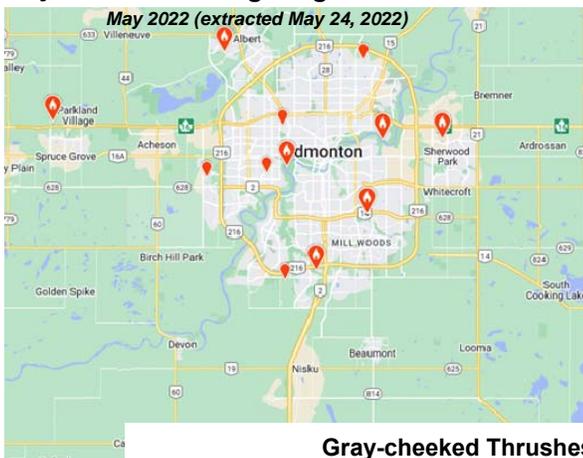
**Gray-cheeked Thrush**

The Gray-cheeked Thrush is known to breed in northern Canada and Alaska, and there is evidence of it breeding in northern British Columbia and potentially in north-western Alberta. It passes through central Albert in the second and third weeks of May and again through much of September. Local birders have always considered it rare and desirable.

Between May 18, 2022, and May 23, 2022, sightings of Gray-cheeked Thrushes at twelve different locations in the Edmonton area were reported to eBird. This compares to sightings at eleven different locations for the ten years 2012 to 2021. I thought this unique abundance should be captured into the ENC long-term memory via *The Parkland Naturalist*.

**Red symbols denote sightings from the last 30 days.**

**May 2012-2021**



**Gray-cheeked Thrushes in Edmonton Area Reported to eBird**

The Gray-cheeked Thrush is a member of the *Cathrus* genus of brown thrushes that also includes the Veery, Swainson's Thrush, and Hermit Thrush. These thrushes are most commonly found feeding on the ground in wooded areas. However, the Gray-cheeked Thrush I observed this spring was feeding out in the open on a lawn alongside a paved trail in Centennial Park. When I first noticed the bird, it was badly back-lit. As I tried to work into a better lighting position, the bird flew into some

adjacent willows. It was in association with several Swainson's Thrushes that were also feeding along the trail and out on the baseball diamonds.

The key distinguishing field mark for the Gray-cheeked Thrush is the lack of an eye-ring that is shown by the Swainson's Thrush and Hermit Thrush. The Hermit Thrush is most easily differentiated by a reddish-brown tail.



*Swainson's Thrush*



*Hermit Thrush*

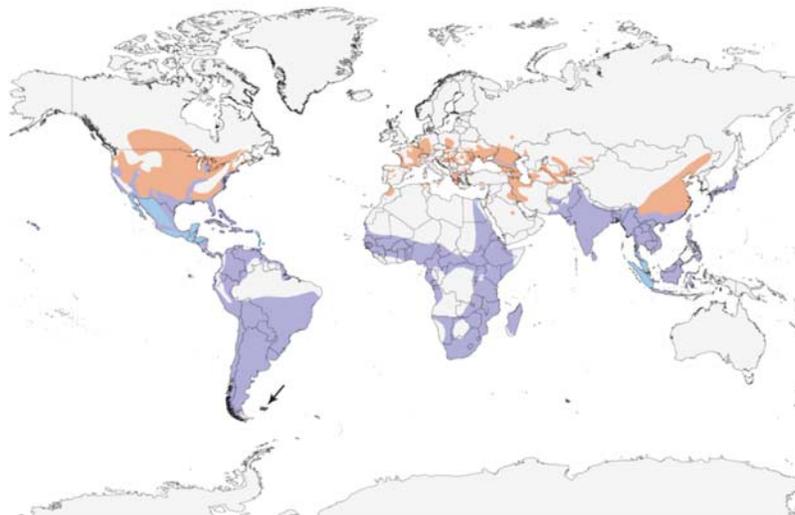
One can only speculate about the large number of sightings of Gray-cheeked Thrush in the Edmonton area this spring. Will it be a one-off occurrence, or are Edmonton birders to be treated to sightings of this interesting bird in future fall and spring migrations?

## An Urban Heron Rookery at Jackie Parker Recreation Area



**Adult Black-crowned Night-Heron in breeding plumage**

The Black-crowned Night-Heron was not included in the 1958 edition of *Birds of Alberta*, by Salt and Wilk. The 1966 edition states that the birds were first observed at Strathmore during the summer of 1958 and a colony of night-herons was discovered at Beaverhill Lake in 1959. The authors note that these and the finding of other nesting colonies in the same time span probably accurately reflect the invasion and dispersion of the species into Alberta, as such a distinctive species would not have escaped detection by the many competent observers in the province. The Black-crowned Night-Heron is now a fairly common summer resident in most of the southern and central parts of the province. Globally, the Black-crowned Night-Heron has a world-wide distribution. I personally was surprised to see such a familiar bird the first time we visited Maui in 2014.



Distribution of the Black-crowned Night-Heron

**Black-crowned Night-Heron**

*Nycticorax nycticorax*

Lyth Edicions/BirdLife International

■ Year-round    ■ Breeding  
■ Migration    ■ Nonbreeding

Source: [https://birdsoftheworld.org/bow/species/bcnher/cur/introduction?\\_hstc=75100365.8d79aa5ab55ce11106c57a419b82cc72.1619553152773.1651519706623.1651867540348.102&\\_hssc=75100365.2.1651867540348&\\_hsfp=4059918300&\\_gl=1\\*wsd84e\\*\\_ga\\*MjEwMTM3Mjg5LjE2MTk1NTMxNTI.\\*\\_ga\\_QR4NVXZ8BM\\*MTY1MTg2NzUzOS44My4xLjE2NTE4Njc1NTEuNDg](https://birdsoftheworld.org/bow/species/bcnher/cur/introduction?_hstc=75100365.8d79aa5ab55ce11106c57a419b82cc72.1619553152773.1651519706623.1651867540348.102&_hssc=75100365.2.1651867540348&_hsfp=4059918300&_gl=1*wsd84e*_ga*MjEwMTM3Mjg5LjE2MTk1NTMxNTI.*_ga_QR4NVXZ8BM*MTY1MTg2NzUzOS44My4xLjE2NTE4Njc1NTEuNDg)

The heron colony at the Jackie Parker Recreation Area is located on the island in the pond by the spray park and playground. The island is a dense thicket, so nests are virtually invisible. The colony is further protected by the fact that the island was planted with thorny buckthorn bushes (personal communication). The Jackie Parker Recreation Area was created in 1989. I have not found a record of when night-herons first nested on the island, but the earliest sightings in the park seem to have been in 2004 (personal communication). The first night-heron in Edmonton reported on eBird was seen in October 1987 in Goldbar Park.



*The rookery island adjacent to the spray park, play park, and picnic area (left)  
Overhead view Google Maps (right)*

Although Black-crowned Night-Herons at Jackie Parker had been reported in eBird as early as April 16, 2022, the first time I checked the area for night-herons in 2022 was on the evening of May 2, and no birds were present. The next time I looked, on the morning of May 6, I saw three night-herons, two in adult plumage and one in brown immature plumage. As there were no leaves on the trees, it was possible to identify three nests. One adult bird was breaking sticks off a tree and flying back toward a nest area.



*An adult collecting a stick to renovate a nest*



*A nest hidden in the thicket*

I visited again at 9:00 a.m. on May 11. There was no visible activity, but after a few minutes of carefully looking I located four birds, as the leaves were not out yet. Two birds were sitting on nests with another adult perched close by. I visited again on May 27 to find only one bird sitting on a nest. One brown night-heron flew in and disappeared into the leaf cover.

At 8:00 p.m. on June 28, there was a lot of human activity. Children were playing in the spray park and adults were sitting at picnic tables and walking along the paths. Two young girls chased mooching Ring-billed Gulls. There was a lot of noise and activity on the rookery, too, including a constant staccato churring of young birds calling for food. During 30 minutes, I observed eight birds fly to the island and ten birds leave. All were black and white adults except for one brown individual. Adults flew from the rookery in all directions. The returning birds partially or completely disappeared into the canopy, but it was clear they were returning to a nest or locating juvenile birds that were walking around in the treetops. As soon as they landed the noise level increased, becoming ghoulish squawks. The adults may have been regurgitating food into the nests because fighting among the juveniles continued even after they left.



*An adult heading out to find food*

Salt and Wilk (1966) comment that “quill covered young, as repulsive in habits as in appearance, disgorge a partially digested meal of fish or frogs when disturbed and clamber off into the rushes. Mortality is very high, for the parents apparently make no attempt to find wandering offspring and give little enough protection to those which remain in the nest.”

My next visit was on the morning of July 4 , from 6:45 until 8:00 a.m. When I arrived, one adult bird was visible in a tree top and young birds were intermittently calling for food. Over the 75-minute time period, I observed eight adults leave the island and six return. Four of the returning birds disappeared deep into the thicket, but two landed on the front trees and were immediately mobbed by juvenile birds. Six juveniles were observed in the treetops doing a fair bit of wing flapping, preening, and just warming in the morning sun.

I checked back in the evening of July 10, but all the parking lots were full of cars and there were people everywhere in the park and adjacent open spaces. Not a good time to go birding. I was back again at 9:00 a.m. on July 11. One adult was visible on the front trees but left as I approached. Over the next hour I saw three more adults leave and four return.

All the returning birds landed deep in the tree cover. The young birds had become very active. I counted nine during the hour. All were exercising their wings and trying short flights from branch to branch. The longest flight I saw was about fifty metres. The bird launched from the top of a poplar, arced out over the pond, and landed lower down in the willows.

My next visit was at 7:00 a.m. on July 18. As I approached, I could hear the normal staccato food calls. One adult flew off. The next hour was full of activity, with over twenty incoming flights and over twenty outgoing flights. Many young birds appeared to have fledged and were doing test flights from the island to the park or around the island. Twice an adult flew off with young birds following it; one adult with one young and one adult with two young. Juveniles were still in the island treetops, but they were also at the water edge both on the island and along the park side. One young bird flew straight from the island, over my head, and back to the island.

I visited again at 8:45 a.m. on July 23. It was quiet on the island until an adult flew in, then the staccato churring and squawking started as the adult must have fed the young. Over the next half hour the churring was intermittent and I saw only three young in the top of the canopy, so I assume some young must have left the island. There were eight arrivals and nine departures. One adult flew west and two juveniles immediately followed. Two juveniles flew up to about 50 metres and for 5 minutes took practice flights and glided around the lake before returning to the island.



*A short flight from branch to branch*



*A test flight out over the pond*

As I approached the island at 7:00 a.m. on July 29, I could hear churring and squawking and see an adult feeding young ones. The adult flew off. After about half an hour, another adult came in and fed young and a third adult came in just as I was leaving at 8:00 a.m. Both birds fed the young and left. The young birds were mostly quiet except when an adult came in with food. I could count five young flapping and preening in the treetops. A sixth young bird flew out from deeper in the canopy, circled the pond, and landed at the top of the spruce tree. It dropped back down when one of the adults came in to feed. Another young bird flew directly across the pond and ended in a willow about 6 metres from where I was sitting. I could see it moving but didn't get a clear look. After about 5 minutes it flew back to the shoreline on the island. Just as I was leaving, a magpie flew to where an adult night-heron had fed young. There was a lot of magpie squawking and the flapping of two young night-herons. I suspect the magpie was trying to steal food scraps.

My next visit was at 7:00 a.m. on August 19. One adult flew off as I approached, but the island was quiet. After 10 minutes or so, two juveniles flew out from the rookery. Around 7:15 I was surprised to hear a juvenile's staccato churring, as I thought the young would all be gone. My final visit to date was on August 29 at 7:15 a.m. The rookery was silent and there were no night-herons around. However, after half an hour I heard two ghoulish croaks from the northeast corner of the island. About a minute later a juvenile night-heron flew from the northeast corner of the island, around the south side of the island, about twenty feet above the water, and landed out of sight on the northwest corner of the island.



*A returning adult being mobbed for food*

Night-herons have stayed in the rookery area until the second week of September (2015), based on sightings reported in eBird. The birds are reported in the Edmonton area until the third week of October and are reported in Alberta until early December. Based on eBird reports, night-herons are absent from the province through January, February, and early March.

As a footnote, I have always recognized Black-crowned Night-Herons as brown juveniles or black, grey, and white adults. This changed on August 3, when I saw a night-heron of a different colour (photo on back cover). The bird was basically grey and black with a purplish over-wash. It was in a loose group of ten adult night-herons that were feeding around several wetlands just to the northeast of Beaverhill Lake. The best explanation of this colour difference that I could find was in a presentation by Bird Ecology Study Group. It is apparently a non-breeding adult.

**Chris Rees**

*All photos by Chris Rees*

### *References*

Bird Ecology Study Group. Black-crowned Night Heron – age changes and breeding plumage. <https://besgroup.org/2022/01/31/black-crowned-night-heron-age-changes-and-breeding-plumage>

Salt, W. Ray, and Wilk, A. L., *Birds of Alberta*, Government of Alberta, 1958.

Salt, W. Ray, and Wilk, A. L., *Birds of Alberta*, Black-crowned Night-Heron, p. 35, Government of Alberta, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1966.



*Juveniles at the water edge*



*Juvenile close in at the play park*



*Adult Black-crowned Night-Heron hunting along Mill Creek*



*A night-heron of a different colour: a non-breeding adult, photo by Chris Rees*