

Shuswap Naturalist Club Newsletter

February 2, 2021

Happy Groundhog Day to you all. In Sunnybrae we have marmots, a very close relative of the groundhog. Since the marmots don't come out of hibernation until about May, we are guaranteed sunny weather.

On a more serious topic, February 2 is also World Wetlands Day. It's a time to reflect on the vital role of wetlands. They are extremely important for wildlife, especially water bird species such as ducks, herons and grebes. The marsh of the Salmon Arm Bay falls into the wetland category. We must continue to do everything we can to protect its health.

While on the topic of protecting the foreshore, Janet Aitken has reminded the club that the entrance to the Kime Trail should have a "No Dog" sign. This is long overdue and should be put in place in early spring. Roger Beardmore has offered to help with this project.

Ban Rat Poisons that are killing B.C. Wildlife

Tomorrow I will be sending out information on the deadly effects of using rat poisons as they are killing BC wildlife. The information comes from Deanna Pfeifer who gives a very compelling argument for why these poisons should be banned. Janet Aitken has viewed Deanna's video and feels strongly that our club should show its support. BC Nature has given its support and I am suggesting that we do the same. You can let me know how you feel.



Financial Statement 2020 - submitted by Ted Hillary

Bank Balance January 1, 2020		\$4,319.17
Revenue		
Dues	1185.00	
Coffee	44.80	
Interest	1.86	
		\$1,231.66
Expenditures		
Administration		
Room Rent - refund	-56.70	
Newsletter/Postage	84.46	
Web Site	99.62	
BCN Annual Dues	1223.42	
50th Anniversary - Trees	902.77	
		\$2,253.57
Bank Balance December 31, 2020		\$3,297.25

Nocturnal Owl Survey – Gillian Richardson

It's almost time (March) for the annual BC-Yukon Nocturnal Owl Survey in the Interior. Here is a bit of introductory information taken from the survey protocol notes:

To improve our understanding and monitoring of owl populations in Western Canada, Birds Canada initiated the BC-Yukon Nocturnal Owl Survey in 2000.

Routes consist of 10 to 30 stops positioned 1.6 km apart along secondary roads. At each stop, the observer simply listens for two minutes and notes any owls heard. Each survey takes about 1 to 2 hours (not including driving time to and from the survey site). Surveys must be done in good weather, and also must be completed before midnight, for volunteer safety.

BC coordinator Graham Sorenson sends this message:

"If you know others near you that are interested in owls and could identify local owl calls, please encourage them to join the survey (by emailing me [Birds Canada](#)). We are always looking for more surveyors in most areas away from the major urban centers. "

Great Backyard Bird Count –

Here is another activity in which members may wish to participate. It's something everyone can do, even without going out very far.

[How to Participate : Great Backyard Bird Count](#)

Spring Outings – Pat Danforth

The Outings Committee has begun planning for Spring 2021. Although the uncertainty continues, we are optimistically going ahead with a calendar and possible family bubble exploration challenges if small group restrictions persist...scavenger hunts, photo challenges, treasure hunts, etc. We're looking forward to whatever options we can all safely enjoy.

Members Share

Joyce's update:

A PS to the Cooper's Hawk eating a pigeon in my yard. No pigeons have landed in my yard since that day. Interesting.

Note from Monica Dahl:

Something interesting happened this month. There are "pop up" libraries in this community and I have found two of them in Royston. It is an honor system of exchanging books and you get to see what the locals are reading. They are little boxes on posts.

Stopped at a close one and exchanged two books. One was a real downer about clones but still very interesting.

The second is called "A Recipe for Bees". I was surprised to find that it is a fictional tale about a couple from the Shuswap locating to Courtenay with bee culture tales interwoven and an acknowledgement to Ted Kay for his input.

Our world is a small place.

Spring Things - Dawn McDonald:

During my morning walk on Little Mountain, I heard the clarion “Hi, Cutie” mating call of a Chickadee this day late in January which reminds me that spring is knocking at our door. The less subtle calls of the Common Flickers are echoed nearby. Squirrels in this forest have been quite active during our warmer winter. I laugh at the way one will set up a treetop chatter to take your eye off the partner on the forest floor. It reminds me of my 3 year old granddaughters when one would dance in front of you while the other raided the cookie pantry.

I awoke this morning to my dog barking at the dark, still hulks of a moose and her yearling calf that have come to look for apples in our back field. The moose is noted for its poor vision so the cow staring our way was checking for danger probably using her more acute hearing and sense of smell. Like a cow she has no top teeth to bite the apples but enjoys her breakfast all the same then has a brief rest. If she is pregnant the calf will soon be chased off after her 8 month gestation period to make way for a new one.



I'm looking forward to February's sunny skies and fledging into a renewal of spring. Hang in there, everybody.

Di's wildcam continues to be a source of wonder:

After nearly 20 years of catching everything from the birth of a fawn to 'popcorn' flying squirrels, I finally caught the *ultimate* on my property.

If anyone wants to see a very brief but breath-taking video of a cougar, please contact me at dwildlife8@gmail.com. I share the video with SNC members under one condition: we must keep this to ourselves. As you know, many people would not be pleased to know this gorgeous cat is in the neighbourhood. I do not want to be responsible for the hue and cry of folks demanding its demise. Please let the cat continue its business in stealthy silence. Thank you.

(note: You might also ask Di to see her recent clip of the coyote. Breathtakingly beautiful.)

From Carla and Wally Kirkpatrick:

On New Year's Day and for several days afterwards there was a beautiful American Kestrel on the railing of the walkway in front of us. Every morning we get up and check to see if all of our Blue Heron are hunkered down. When they are in the tall bullrushes it is our version of *Where's Waldo*.



This Kestrel was seen hanging out near Nations Cannabis Store on January 22nd.

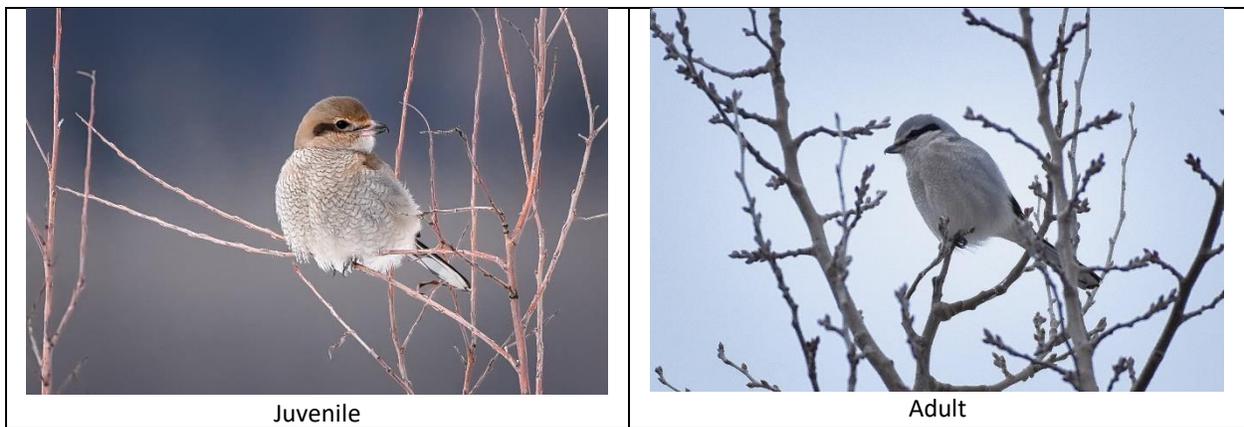
Pint-sized Predator: The Northern Shrike

by Roger Beardmore

The Northern Shrike (*Lanius borealis*) is a winter resident of Salmon Arm Bay, typically arriving in late September and staying until March or early April when they depart for their breeding locations along the tundra fringes of the boreal forest from Labrador to Alaska.

Identification:

About the size of an American Robin (although 15% lighter), the Northern Shrike is a large-headed songbird with a thick hooked beak. Adults have a gray head with black mask, black wings and tail with white flashes. Juveniles are tawny brown with light barring on the undersides. Mask is paler, sometimes incomplete.



Juvenile

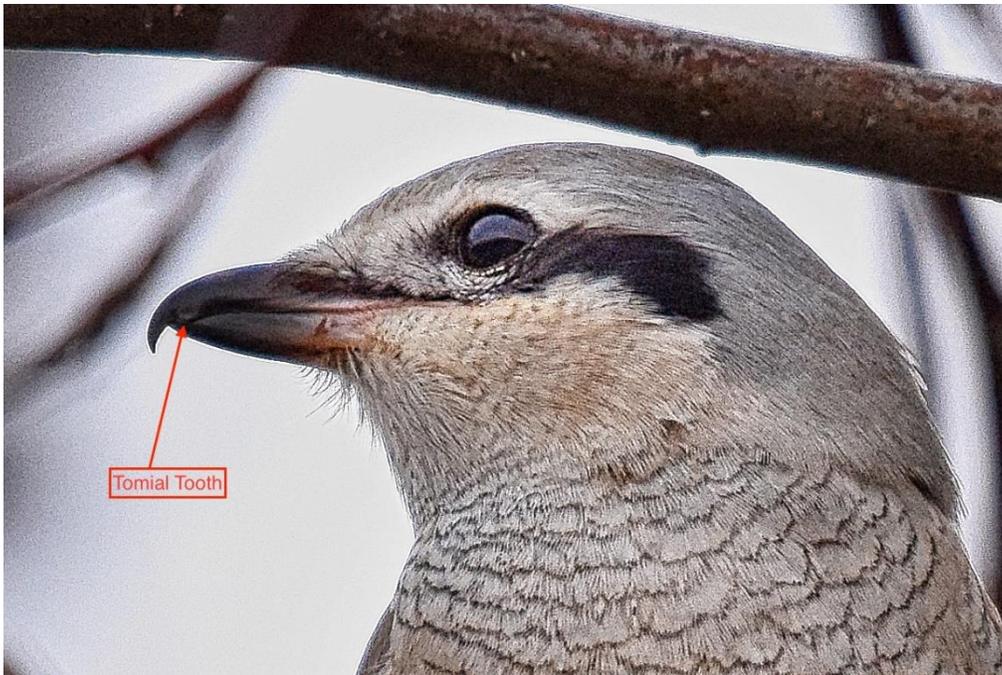
Adult

Habitat:

With a preference for brushy, open and semi-open habitats, Salmon Arm Bay is made to order for one or more wintering Northern Shrikes. They tend to hold and actively defend specific territories, enabling repeated sightings along the waterfront from Raven to Christmas Island, to the wharf, to Peter Jannink Park and west to the Niskonleth Reserve. They have also been known to stake out bird feeders to take advantage of the birds attracted to those sites, such as along the boardwalk by Lakeshore Manor, where local residents have had repeated sightings.

Hunting and killing: equipped for the job!

Shrikes are a rarity amongst songbirds for their penchant of preying on and eating small animals, although insects also make up a considerable part of their diet when available. The only visual hint that this rather diminutive songbird may have nefarious intentions is its black mask, and its robust hooked bill. This latter feature may not be particularly prominent at first glance. Upon closer examination, however, the bill is revealed as a superbly designed instrument, complete with "**tomial tooth**", that can have lethal consequences for those unfortunate creatures on its dining menu.



More common to birds of prey such as falcons, kites and hawks, the **tomial tooth** is a tooth-like protrusion, on both sides, near the tip of the upper bill, with corresponding notches on the lower mandible. This feature enables them to quickly dispatch prey by biting their neck and severing the spinal cord.

Shrikes apply a range of methods to capture their prey. They sleuth their way through dense brush watching for rodent pathways and monitor bird nests waiting for the best opportunity to attack. They will also perch prominently on a bush or post to scan for prey, and drop down quickly on a vole or give chase to bird which they seize or drive to the ground to make the kill. Shrikes do not have talons like raptors, but their feet are strong enough to seize and carry prey. If not required immediately, they may impale it on thorns or wedge it in a branch for later use.



I have witnessed these techniques in action recently, and while the dying squeal of small bird or mammal is never pleasant, there can be no small measure of appreciation for the skill and cunning required by the **Northern Shrike** to survive and thrive, doing what it is designed to do!



Reference: <https://ebird.org/species/norsh4>
https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Northern_Shrike

All photos by Roger Beardmore

PS: Here is a link to a fun website where you can click on a bird and hear it sing. Even though it's got a lot of eastern birds, there's enough overlap to make it fun!

https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/mcvmagazine/bird_songs_interactive/index.html

Sarah's poetic offering that
shows nature's determination:

Asphalt

by Sarah Weaver

highway crews last summer
crawled their black bitumen machines
along our road

scraping old blacktop
melting it in huge boilers
which belched tarry smoke
into the fir fragrant forest
and then, heat shimmering
rolled out smooth ebony
pasting a new skin on the earth

after, I walked the polished surface
and saw the round holes made by engineers
plugs pulled and put back
to test its strength

this summer, the road edge hummocked
black surface bulging from unseen forces
volcanic eruptions cracking the asphalt
into scatterings of charcoal crumbs
as delicate white orbs of mushrooms
and bright green shoots of chicory
pushed through the engineers' assurances
and found the sun



