

Shuswap Naturalist Club Newsletter

March 2, 2021

In normal times this would be the evening of our March meeting. So, I welcome all of you and thank all those members who have contributed to the creation of this newsletter.

1. Rat Poisons -

Our concern with its use is being well addressed.

Janet Pattinson writes - There has been much news about the effects of the use of rodenticides on non-target species such as owls and raptors generally. The Environmental Advisory Committee of the City of Salmon Arm is sending to city council a recommendation that rodenticides not be used in city facilities and that the city lobby the provincial government about a total ban.

It is unlikely that the province will ban them until there is a dependable alternative. Currently the BC SPCA is monitoring some developments in the area of alternatives.

March 8th is the council meeting date when a presentation will be made to go with the recommendation.

The Motion to Council -

RECOMMENDATION That Council:

1. Adopt the policy of introducing a complete ban on use of anticoagulant rodenticides on all City of Salmon Arm owned properties, with immediate effect.
2. Directs staff to communicate this policy direction to residents and businesses, including information on the harmful impacts of anticoagulant rodenticides and the availability of more ecologically sustainable alternatives.
3. Requests that the Mayor write, on behalf of Council, to the provincial Minister of Environment, requesting that the Province of British Columbia introduce a province-wide ban on the use of anticoagulant rodenticides, to increase protection for wildlife species.
4. To incorporate humane practices in regards to pest control in all City of Salmon Arm properties.

CONCLUSION

Anticoagulant rodenticides pose serious threats to BC wildlife, the environment, and human health. The permitted and continued use of these harmful poisons is inconsistent with the obligations owed by the government to protect its citizens and the environment from harmful chemicals. Anticoagulant rodenticides are dangerous, ineffective and unlawful - the City/ District must take action to reduce the use of these products and petition the BC government to implement a province-wide ban.

2. Tree Removal

There was some concern about a plan to cut down some willow trees along Harbourfront Drive. Janet Aitken and Joyce Henderson did some investigation and learned that the plan was to prune the water sprouts from the willows. Good news story!

Eagle nest in one of the willows.



3. Raptor Monitors Wanted - by Di Wittner

As you may have read in recent BC Nature news, volunteers are wanted to monitor raptor nests on behalf of the Hancock Foundation. Over the years the foundation has amassed an impressive data set of known nests, including maps, behavioural observations and breathtaking nestcams that capture the birds in action. See www.hancockwildlife.org.

The process is relatively simple, requiring a minimum of three visits to a known nest (per breeding season) and recording information such as date, species, and any activities worth commenting on such as size and number of young. Photographs of the nest itself, the nest tree and the general area are encouraged.

Though the Hancock Foundation's specialty is eagles, they are looking for observers of ospreys and peregrines as well. Our ospreys at the wharf or in Sunnybrae would be easy-peezy or, if you're looking for something more challenging, you could try the peregrines on the cliffs above Sunnybrae Park.

If this sounds like a project you might be interested in, you are encouraged to contact David Hancock at hancockeaglemonitors@gmail.com.

Check out this picture of a Falcon nesting in an old tree -

I found this sighting very intriguing. Pat Mearns sent it, saying, "This will have to go into the bird count this year!!!!"

<http://i.imgur.com/YW6Fufm.jpg>

4. Nature Journaling - *Doubling the Pleasure and Value of Every Walk* -

from Pat Danforth and the outing committee

"A nature journal is a lens that focuses our attention and crystallizes our observations, thoughts, and experiences. The system is creative, rigorous, and playful, easy to begin and learn, and will grow and mature over a lifetime." This quote is from John Muir Laws, a renowned naturalist, artist and advocate of Nature Journaling as a way to connect, commune with and recall his natural world observations.

The Outing Committee wonders if a Pandemic and an open spring calendar provide a unique opportunity to explore the power Muir Laws has discovered in Nature Journaling. If interested, enjoy his beginner videos attached or any of the hundreds of others on his extensive website at:

<https://johnmuirlaws.com>

Although there are classes and activities with a cost, much of what he offers is freely available.

<https://johnmuirlaws.com/nature-journaling-starting-growing/>

This video is for curious beginners.

<https://johnmuirlaws.com/getting-started-with-nature-journaling-video/>

The **Nature Journal Connection** is a series of short video suited to a step-by-step approach and artist of all ages. <https://johnmuirlaws.com/the-nature-journal-connection/>

For those interested but, entirely new to Nature Journaling, Laws makes recommendations for materials. However, inexpensive starter Journals can be found at Dollarama and perhaps the other Dollar stores. We also noticed small artist sketching journals at Wickett's.

Members Share

Note from Fern Fennel:

Hi from Parksville, BC. I'm snow birding it here at the beach. I'm seeing tons of birds: both shore, dabblers, raptors and song birds. Last week before the snow I saw almost 40 species in an eight km loop over four hours. It's a treasure to be in a mild climate with a varied ecosystem! I'm on Parksville Bay and also close to the Englishman estuary with a walk behind some houses with feeders (most changed daily) and a huge blackberry bramble patch with leaves.

The locals are putting on a virtual Brant Festival and here's an article about it. I got the photo credits. Hope all is well up in SA. I'll be back soon to expand my photo skills with local wild life and birds. Cheers.

https://www.pqbnews.com/marketplace/brant-wildlife-festival-wings-its-way-to-local-beaches-marshes-backyards-beyond/?fbclid=IwAR0X29V9gRcpqkes4Rm_P9pXL3IUwDJn3QD8Q3aBT6JN1R44kKDRh36ZR6Q

From Gillian Richardson:

Just a wee nature observation to report: on Sunday at noon we spotted a 'bump' in the spruce tree outside our living room window which, on closer inspection, turned into an owl.....pygmy or saw-whet was the question. Problem was, he sat with his back to us while we watched him chow down on a gray furry lunch (vole?). And when he turned around later, his face was obscured by a couple of spruce twigs. His belly streaks matched the description for Northern Pygmy Owl, though, so that's what we decided. He sat all afternoon, disappearing into the dusk about 5:30. How many voles will a pygmy need to eat in a day? Nice of him to show up on a FeederWatch count day!

Here are a couple of awesome videos. If you love Humming birds, you will love these.

<https://1funny.com/hummingbird-sleeping-while-hanging-upside-down/>

Note from our newest member, Claire Christensen:

I read the February newsletter and found it very interesting. The article on Northern Shrikes was impressive, as were the photos. Last spring, I was thrilled to see one on a bush just outside my riding ring, close to one of my bluebird boxes. It was early in the season and hoped my bluebirds would hold off long enough for the shrike to find some suitable habitat elsewhere before they arrived. The following day, further down the field where there are more bluebird boxes mounted, I found the remains of what looked like the spotted feathers of the little Pygmy Owl, hanging attached to a carcass on the barbed wire. I had observed and was able to photograph for the first time from my deck not three days before. I was saddened at the possibility of having lost such a beautiful little owl. Just like all things in life, great pleasures and great sorrows in our birding pursuits.

Claire wrote that she was enjoying a walk to Christmas Island last week. All the birds were singing and acting as if it was spring. She was surprised that there were no birds to be seen on the island, and then she heard a different song. She looked, and here is her picture of what she saw, a Northern Shrike!



Gabi Klein writes:

Just read something in the National that came from The Guardian about cats and hunting... Because cats kill so many birds this might be useful.

One item I found very interesting is that a brightly coloured collar seems to protect birds but not mice and rats (that would appeal to my priorities). Interesting.

<https://www.nationalobserver.com/2021/02/16/news/why-your-cat-likes-kill-stuff-wildlife>

From Pat Turner:

It has not been the best weather for nature walks, but it has been good for watching my birdfeeder. The Goldfinches found it first, and sometimes I counted nearly 30 of them busily pecking at the bird feeder, or down below on the ground. House Sparrows have joined the party, and enjoy bumping each other or the Goldfinches off the perches. A pair of flickers come sometimes, usually one at a time and lower the level in the feeder rather quickly, and then peck at the fat feeder. One cat finds it just as, maybe even more entertaining than I do, although what she really would like to do is to be allowed out on the deck to catch herself a tasty snack!

Now we know where all the Goldfinches are hanging out!

Another amazing and informative presentation by Roger Beardmore -

Winter Ruffian - The Ruffed Grouse

Recently, I had the rare pleasure of encountering Ruffed Grouse on a couple of my winter birding outings. Although not rare, these birds are difficult to spot due to their “super-camo” colour pattern and predilection for foraging and roosting in dense vegetation. However, they do occasionally pop out onto a country road in front of your vehicle and stand their like they own it, forcing you to slow down or even stop while they saunter across - taking their sweet time! (See the example).

Male Ruffed Grouse crossing Mallory Road south of Gardom Lake.

Note black “ruff” on the shoulders, which the bird can elevate and spread when displaying for females and defending territory.



Roger Beardmore

Notwithstanding their cryptic behaviour and colouration, Ruffed Grouse are widespread across all of BC, and in fact, all forested areas of Canada and the northern United States. However, like many birds, their numbers have been in steep decline due to habitat loss, pesticide use, and its immense popularity as a game bird.

Habitat Use

Preferred habitats include mixed groves of birch, aspen and spruce in their northern range, while deciduous forests occupy their eastern and southern range. In BC, logging has actually created some preferential habitats where early-successional species such as birch, aspen and native berry trees, have been allowed to naturally regenerate the cut-blocks. Riparian zones are also among their preferred habitats. Locally, the Larch Hills, Gardom Lake, Skimikin Lake, and Tsutswew (Roderick Haig-Brown) Provincial Park have all reported relatively recent sightings. So, keep a sharp-eye out if you are out in one of these areas!

Unique Adaptations

Ruffed Grouse have a number of behavioural and physical adaptations that permit them to prevail through the long northern winters. They will often bury themselves in the soft snow to roost and avoid exposure to the cold winds and temperatures. They have been known to explode from the snow in front of snowshoers or skiers providing an unexpected “jolt” to an otherwise serene winter outing!

The feathers on the legs grow thicker and further towards the toes help to retain warmth, and on its beak, feathers grow to cover the nostrils, slowing the intake of air and giving it a chance to warm before being inhaled by the grouse.

Built-in snowshoes

Perhaps the neatest adaptation of all is their toes, that seasonally grow little projections off the sides, called **pectinations** (meaning comb-like) to distribute their weight and act as mini-snowshoes to facilitate walking on snow! These are lateral extensions of the scales on the toes and are not feathers. Each year, they begin to grow in the fall, and fall off in the spring. Ruffed Grouse in more northern regions, where the snow is often deeper and more persistent, have pectinations that can be twice as long as those in more temperate climates. How cool is that?!



Roger Beardmore



Friends of the Mississippi River

Food and Foraging

To minimize exposure to predators while foraging and feeding, Ruffed Grouse eat quickly. They are poor at storing fat, so must eat large quantities. In winter they have adapted to eating tree buds, twigs and catkins of aspen, alder, birch, willow and other species that other birds can't handle. They rely on their gizzard to grind up the roughage, and then extra-long paired pouches in their intestines help to digest the rough cellulose fibres. They also will take advantage of a fruit tree to chow down on remaining fruit, but perching while accessing fruit hanging from flimsy branches may become an exercise in contortion as much as determination! (See below).



Ruffed Grouse performing acrobatics while eating crab-apples from tree at the corner of Grandview Bench and Edgar Road en route to Larch Hills Ski Trails. Roger Beardmore

Drumming Display

Perhaps the male Ruffed Grouse's most distinct behavioural characteristic is its signature drumming display that is used both to attract a mate (in spring) or to ward off other male grouses (in fall) from "their territory". This is usually performed on a fallen log, rock, or other promontory, with crest, namesake ruff, and tail erect - inflating itself to nearly twice its normal size, and beating its wings to create a rapid staccato drum beat! Very impressive stuff! Here's hoping you get to see one of these charismatic characters in your birding or other outdoor adventures soon! In the meantime, you may wish to click on the link below where you can watch a male drumming, and listen to other cool vocalizations from the unique and endearing Ruffed Grouse!

https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Ruffed_Grouse/sounds

References

<https://www.featheredphotography.com/blog/2019/01/07/ruffed-grouse-have-built-in-snowshoes-and-theyre-not-made-of-feathers/>

https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Ruffed_Grouse/lifehistory

https://northernwoodlands.org/outside_story/article/why-ruffed-grouse-take-winter-in-stride

Finding ourselves in nature -

Salmon Run, Adams River

by Sarah Weaver

I smell it first, acrid air wafting
across the lake
from where the river empties into the bay

then, walking the moist trail through cottonwoods
find, discarded in thickets, disintegrating fish,
bellies clawed open, scoured by bear

the river is crimson with gleaming bodies
which fling themselves upstream
tails thrashing against the force

its gravels receive their rosy eggs
in death they will be reborn
their young fed with their bones

bleached carcasses pile in heaps along the rocky edge
are pushed against log jams by rushing current

raven, gull and eagle pick the remains amidst
ammonia smell of decay

and still I see, more

fins slice the water
dance in brilliant sun
a million glittering sails

among them lies a man, prone
clothed in shining black
still as a corpse in the rippling water
captures images, bears witness

we are thousands
tens of thousands
paying homage

all have journeyed
in wheelchairs, strollers
swaggering teens, women in heels
stooped elders limping with canes
tattooed bikers and noisy children
dogs of all breeds and size

through the scent of frying bannock
past the festival tents with postcards and tee shirts

we are pilgrims
in awe
drawn perhaps by
spectacle

or—

or
do we come
because we know
our bodies know

we are salmon
we are flowing river

salmon blood is our blood
sun-whitened skeletons
are our bones

we come
not because salmon are different
but because
we are they

