

Shuswap Naturalist Club Newsletter

February 2022



This is a picture of the thank you card created by Roger Beardmore for club use. He had them made up for us to use to express our thanks to those who contribute to the club and nature. And now we thank him.

Roger and Nan are moving to Comox to be near family, and they will be sorely missed by all of us who have worked with Roger and benefited by what he has contributed to the club. Marlene and I will also miss the conversations we had with Nan, who we would often meet on our walks.

Roger has been an outstanding member. He has worked with installing the bird houses for our bird house project, created signs along the foreshore to educate visitors and all of us about swallows, led members on birding walks, worked with the injured bird rescue and has educated us with his wonderful newsletter contributions. You will certainly enjoy this month's installment on coyotes.

Note from Roger - It has been a great pleasure and privilege to be part of the Shuswap Naturalists, and I will definitely keep in touch to pass along some highlights from the coast! We will miss you all, but intend to be back for regular visits, so it's not "goodbye", but "see you later!".

Update on our Award - This year the Thompson Rivers University administration decided to extend the deadline for faculty to choose award recipients (such as ours) to the end of January. So, at this point the award has not been paid out. We anticipate that will happen during February.

BC Nature AGM - Don't forget our provincial AGM will be held conveniently close at UBCO in Kelowna, May 26 - 28. Hosted by the Central Okanagan Naturalists, this will be BC Nature's first in-person AGM in three years. For all the details, including registration, program and field trips, visit okanagannature.org/bc-nature-agm-2022. Registration has been delayed a bit but should be available by the end of February.

An artistic view of Swans
at Old Town Bay near Sicamous



Bunchberry (*Cornus Canadensis*)

- Anne Cauglin

Many plant lovers' call this wee plant the 'Baby Dogwood' and that is because the plant is related to our provincial floral emblem, the Pacific Dogwood Tree - *Cornus nuttallii*.

The plants make a lovely ground cover, growing about 2 – 8" high. In the spring the flowers open in white 'petals', (which are actually leaves) surrounding the tiny greenish florets and above a whorl of 6 large green leaves. The fruits are bright red round berries, or drupes, formed in the autumn from the tiny 'true' flowers.



Cornus is Latin for 'horn' and Lewis J. Clark suggests it refers to the nubby end of the bracts when they are in flower. The range includes our entire area of the Okanagan/Shuswap and extending across Canada – hence the specific name. The plants are also found throughout North America and in areas of Asia and Europe.

Both birds and bears will eat the berries, and in the summer when a pollinator bee or insect brushes against the bristle at the end of the petal, it triggers an explosion of pollen into the air. Stop the next time you see this plant and try the experiment!

Neil Jennings relates a Nootka legend that the Bunchberry arose from the menstrual blood of a woman bound in a cedar tree by her jealous husband.

Many of our BC First Nation coastal groups reported to Nancy Turner that they ate the berries, but few groups in the interior report food use. Most considered them to be meant for birds or bears. The berries are reported to improve night vision in birds and there is research on the link to bird migration, especially the Passenger Pigeon.

In North America the focus was on the *Cornus nuttallii* for medicinal purposes, specifically the bark. A tea or tincture was made of the bark for a tonic, stringent or stimulant, and was considered a substitute for Cinchona (from which Quinine was made). The flowers were also gathered for uses similar to chamomile, that is - as a tea to sooth the stomach.

References:

Food Plants of Interior First Peoples by Turner 1997

Wild Flowers of the Pacific Northwest: from Alaska to Northern California by Clark 1976

Plants of southern Interior British Columbia and the Inland Northwest by Parish/coupe/Lloyd 1996

Central Beauty: Wildflowers and Flowering Shrubs of the Southern Interior of British Columbia by Jennings 2008

Indian Herbalogy of North America by Alma R. Hutchens 1973

Hunting the Long-billed Curlew

- Di Wittner

Birds Canada is looking for clubs to count Long-billed Curlews (LBCU) in their area this spring. There hasn't been a comprehensive survey of this species in BC since 2005. The population estimate in our province at that time was 7,436 individuals. COSEWIC is hoping to create an up-to-date assessment of the species' conservation status, which was designated as 'Special Concern' in 1992. Long-billed curlews are currently Blue listed in BC and recent reports suggest their numbers are declining.

A spy from our inner circle tells me our club has done this before so I'm wondering if we might have a few keeners who would undertake this again in 2022. The survey would take place sometime between April 15th and May 15th. Procedural protocols will come from David Bradley at Birds Canada. It's a bit more complicated than our Christmas bird count, not unlike the sort of scientific data collection one might do in a research project. At our March meeting, I will take a few moments to address the club about this event. In the meantime, if you think you would like to participate, or if you took part before, please be prepared to join the discussion. Could be very enjoyable!

From the Environmental Advisory Committee

- Janet Pattinson

The committee has noticed that Bylaw #2305 "... regulate and prohibit the cutting down and removal of trees" written in 1995 should be reviewed and probably updated! There is a subcommittee reviewing it and the EAC could make recommendations to the city council for changes.

This bylaw includes a few prohibitions and many exceptions with regard to cutting down trees. One exception is that trees with trunks less than 31.5 cm in circumference are not protected. The bylaw gives details for getting permits to cut trees and mentions a \$2000 fine per offence.

There are two Schedules - **A**: Landscape Trees and **B**: Wildlife Trees. A mentions only one location for protection, the west end of Marine Park Drive. B identifies the heronry in use at the time the bylaw was written.

I would very much like to hear from anyone who can give me some background on how this bylaw came into being. Can anyone remember if there was a public campaign to save trees such as those at the west end of Marine Drive or the heronry? Can anyone suggest any other trees that could be included as Landscape Trees? Does anyone know if the trees at the west end of Marine Drive are still in place or have they disappeared?? I hear that the herons have chosen new trees for their nests. Are there other trees we feel should be included in the wildlife section: eagle trees? I would like to hear from anyone with comments or suggestions for the saving of trees.

Another bylaw that the EAC is reviewing is Bylaw #3744: "...cosmetic use of pesticides..." It includes three "whereas" statements, one of which mentions "...concern about non-essential use of pesticides. It includes many definitions and a regulation, "no person shall ..." but with many exceptions, for example, golf courses. There is reference to Certified Applicators. The word penalty is mentioned but without specifics. They mention "ticket information utilization bylaw #2760. In Schedule A they list 22 permitted pesticides including rodenticides and rotenone. Recently the city chose not to use the rodenticides on their own property but this bylaw does not prohibit that toxin from other properties.

You can find these bylaws on the city's website. I would be keen to hear from anyone with comments on how these two bylaws might be changed for the better. Janet Pattinson (scouse5@icloud.com)

Walk the Nature Trail

- with Fern Fennel

With the warmer weather and securing a good pair of ice trackers for my boots, my daily walks have yielded some interesting birding and scenery. I had heard reports of large flocks of Bohemian Waxwings and last week on a dull day near sundown, I heard their twittering and came across a large flock, in the hundreds, at the north end of Raven Foreshore Trail.



Most photos were too dark as it was late in the day with a dark grey sky. However, a couple days later, I came across a smaller flock (about 100) in the exact same area. They were feeding on snowberries beside the railway track. I have also had the pleasure to view some Cedar Waxwings at the mid-section of the Foreshore Trail, but in much smaller numbers.



The club, and specially Di Wittner, will be happy to hear that the bird house boxes on the Foreshore Trail have been used as a perch by a gorgeous looking Northern Shrike. The pretty species perched for a good ten minutes looking down and around for any prey, and not seeing any, flew across the trail and out of sight.

This area at the Raven end of the Foreshore Trail is a favourite of Black-capped Chickadees, which are very habituated and will feed off one's hand or head if carrying some sunflower seeds. Someone also has set up little wooden boards in the trees beside the trail and appears to set out appropriate bird seed daily.

This section of the trail also had yielded a nice selection of birds including: Juncos, Song Sparrows, Spotted Towhees, a Townsend's Solitaire, Pheasants, Downy Woodpeckers, Pileated Woodpeckers,

Northern Flickers, Robins, Eagles, Crows, Ravens, American Goldfinches, Mallards and even a fly-by of two Trumpeter Swans! This trail also has some of the best views of the lake and surrounds hills and mountains. What a treat on a clear sunny day!

Here are the cheeky chickadees!



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Northern Saw-whet Owl

Glynn Green reported that it stayed near the river mouth for several days, devouring several voles.

Virginia Rail

This is the Virginia Rail that was seen along the Nature Trail on our Christmas Bird Count. The expression "As thin as rail" does not really apply here.



Visiting the Larch Hills - with Blaine Carson



This is a dead white pine that has lost its bark and I don't know whether they are all twisted, but this one certainly is. The snow on top sometimes resembles Darth Vader. It is close enough to the North Hub in the summer that one can walk to it and on the way is the Signature White Pine of this trail.



It is nice to see that the fungi in the Larch Hills have warm hats to protect them from the cold.



Mule deer near North Broadview
Blaine tells us he us meeting them everywhere.

Note from Janet Aitken -

Roger was a member of the SaveShuswapSongbird Committee and helped make significant contributions. He was the author and the photographer who created the beautiful swallow signs that are on the board walk in front of Lakeside Manor and along the foreshore. If you have tried to design a sign from start to finish, you can begin to guess the number of hours this would take. The sign features the six swallows that are found in this area. Thank you, Roger.

I remember first meeting Roger and Nan on the Armstrong Bird count after meeting at the Anchor Inn. I was the new member and they made me feel welcome. Roger has always willingly shared his beautiful photos and the location of his bird discoveries. Remember the Field Spar? Wasn't that exciting for everyone? Thanks to Nan for that one.

All the best in your new surroundings. You will be missed here in the Shuswap.

Coyote (*Canis latrans*)

Written by Roger Beardmore,
for levity and frivolity.

Edited by Dianne Wittner,
for clarity and validity.

January 22, 2022



While out birding recently down by Salmon Arm Bay, I noticed a Coyote trotting along an old line of fence posts in the marsh near the Salmon River. It was alone, and it was clear from its behaviour that it was hunting for rodents. It would stop and tilt its head, using its acute sense of hearing to detect rodents moving in the grass under the snow. It then took a leap in the air, and pounced with both its front paws, trying to break the recent crust on the snow and expose its prey! *Success!* Out popped a little mouse and the chase was on!



Although this didn't end well for the mouse, it revealed one of the many strategies that these intelligent carnivores use to thrive in even the harshest conditions. Coyotes are opportunistic, primarily feeding on rodents, but will also eat some vegetation, berries, fruit, bird eggs, insects, especially grasshoppers, and/or carrion when available. They typically hunt alone or in pairs, but will occasionally hunt in small packs to bring down larger game.

Coyotes are mid-sized wild dogs, smaller than wolves, but larger than foxes. Adults vary between 120 and 150 cm long (including 30-40 cm tail) and between 9 and 23 kg in weight. (note... only the eastern coyote would get close to 23 kg... the western coyote ranges from 9-16 kgvery fine boned and lots of hair!). They range from grey to reddish brown in colour, with darker areas on the back and lighter underneath. An average of five pups are born in April or early May. The young are cared for by the parents and by the extended family – or 'helpers' - which comprise offspring from previous years. They may disperse after only 5 or 6 months, but may also stay as part of the extended family for two years or more. They can live for up to 12 years in the wild when left undisturbed by humans! Natural predators for Coyotes are Wolves and Cougars.

Coyotes are found throughout BC, except for Vancouver Island, and can adapt to a variety of habitats where there is suitable food. Unfortunately, this is often in close association with human habitation. While some homeowners and farmers appreciate the rodent control capabilities of the Coyote, others see them as a pest and hazard for family pets or small livestock. Urban Coyotes are also at risk from being struck and killed by vehicles.



There is much we as humans can do to prevent negative interactions with Coyotes. Feed pets indoors and supervise them outside! Use protective fencing where appropriate. Secure garbage and compost containers. Never attract or feed wildlife. Overall, this handsome, but much maligned creature has a role to play, and many qualities we can admire...not the least of which is the ability to adapt and survive in difficult times!!

References: <https://www.hww.ca/en/wildlife/mammals/coyote.html>
<https://wildsafebc.com/species/coyote/>

Photos: All photos by Roger Beardmore