

Shuswap Naturalist Club Newsletter

April 2022

The change that takes place as we embrace our love of nature is not so much in our minds, but in our hearts. This is again evident in the contributions sent us for the newsletter.

The Recipient of our Shuswap Naturalist Club Award

Each year a Thompson Rivers University student in environmental studies is chosen to receive our club award. We are very pleased to announce that Alexa Wiebe is this year's award recipient, a truly worthwhile candidate. Here she is and here is her letter:



Thank You

From
Alexa Wiebe
PROGRAM. Natural Resource Sciences

Dear Shuswap Naturalist Club,

Thank you very much for your generous donation to Thompson Rivers University and for this award that I have received. It means a lot to me to have my efforts recognized and celebrated through the nomination of this award. This award is offered to a student who shows potential in a future career in environmental conservation and protection, and that is exactly what I plan to do. I am very passionate about wildlife, and birds in particular. I spent my last summer helping a graduate student with her thesis research on Western Rattlesnakes in Osoyoos and I have fallen in love with field work and working with endangered species in particular. I plan to continue to work with endangered species and my goal is to aid in the reintroduction of species at risk in this area. Your generous donation is extremely encouraging and offers me a step in the right direction. I can't thank you enough.

Sincerely,
Alexa Wiebe

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Looking Forward to our Outings

- Dawn McDonald

The snow line is slowly sliding down my pasture hill; I'm finding trails that are not packed down in ice and the birdsongs are bursting from our trees. I'm so looking forward to rambling along with my naturalists friends on our outings. The lineup this year is a great mix of our favourite spots like the Lakeshore, Neskonlith and Rosemond and we are excited to have early morning birding with John and Don. I haven't been to Solvang or the Swan Lake Trail yet so that will be fun. I hope many of you will dust off those hiking boots and get ready for the great walks and discoveries that we will enjoy together. See you soon!!

The New Bluebird Trail

Mountain Bluebirds have been reported near the Peterson farm in the North Broadview area for the last few years. A new bluebird trail is now being created in the area, a project of the Songbird Committee. Very exciting.

Janet, Carla Di and Fern put the first of the birdboxes on a farm fence line at 45th Avenue and 25th Street NE, installing four boxes. The property owner took another box which he will place near a small vineyard on the back piece of his property.



A week later Di and Fern installed another four boxes near the Peterson Orchards.

The bluebirds were already checking out two of the boxes and using them as perches for foraging for insects! (Flies and even a mosquito).

Fern has volunteered to record observations of each box and cleaning them out at the end of the season.

She writes, "If members want to observe the bluebirds the best time seems to be early morning after the sun is up and to use their vehicle as a "blind". There is a pull out just across from the Peterson corner box and it is the closest spot to seeing the birds. Bring your binoculars and zoom lens (if you have one) and be very patient and hopefully the birds will come to the spot while not being disturbed by human observations."



Fern Fennell photos



Enchanted Forest in Interpretive Forest Walk, Larch Hills

Our Interpretive Trail Committee met last week to clarify our plans for upgrading signage on this Larch Hills trail. Thanks to Pat Danforth, Keith Cox, Ann Caughlin, Gerry Schellenberg, Dawn McDonald and Clint Smith for your welcome and helpful input.

We have been granted \$2500 from BC Nature to go toward this venture. We will be working on coming up with informative, attractive and durable signs and on deciding on their placement this year. Our goal is to have them ready to put in place next spring.

Pat will elaborate on our plans at our April 6 meeting and we will seek your input on this great project. We hope to see you there.

from Dawn McDonald

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A Book Review

- by Gabi Klein

I just received this gift book, am enjoying immensely and would like to recommend it to everyone.

Nature's Best Hope

"A new Approach to Conservation That Starts in Your Yard"

by Douglas W. Tallamy (Author of "Bringing Nature Home")

From the back cover:

In "Nature's Best Hope", Douglas W. Tallamy urges homeowners to take environmental action into their own hands, one yard at a time. This homegrown approach sidesteps the short sightedness of governmental policy and the physical limitation of our isolated national parks—empowering us all.

This is an American book, but should not stop us from adopting strategies.

I'm in the process of being inspired and taking more action to further and expand my 'pocket park' as Hanne so delightfully called it.

I think it's going to help me cut down on some yard maintenance by allowing more areas to be naturally 'wild'. I have to learn more about native plants and allow them to flourish and/or put them in. I am going to try to be an example (perhaps will be criticized) for the neighbourhood. Last fall I threw wildflower seeds on the front section that actually belongs to the city. It has been a 'fight' to try to keep grass there to make it look tidy, but I'm going to see if I can be untidy and natural. Will see - it also means a shift in my thinking.

Nature's Circle of Life

- Fern Fennel

On a sunny day a few weeks ago I drove to Otter Lake, south west of Armstrong, to check out the ducks and such that had been reported on eBird. I saw my first Killdeer on the Salmon River Road in Spallumcheen in a farmer's field with many Trumpeter Swans just across the road. At Otter Lake I was surprised to see close to 1000 Northern Pintail Ducks (hard to count with so many) and hundreds of Canada Geese also in the unfrozen north end of the marsh and creek area. The main lake was still frozen. I spoke to a man who lived on the property. He said that the geese come each year and stay for about two weeks. There were also some other dabbling ducks such as Mallards, Teals, Buffleheads, Goldeneye and even a couple of Wigeon. I decided to drive along the rest of the lake and see how much was frozen... all of it.

I had noticed a few Bald Eagles flying around, and on the way back, I saw a few eagles on the frozen lake in the middle with something on the ice. With my bins and zoom lens I soon was able to witness the circle of life up close! A large deer had died on the lake and a group of about seven eagles were at the carcass. Actually, a large mature eagle was eating and keeping the others, who all appeared to be immature, at bay. This went on for several minutes.



When I looked back, I saw a coyote trotting up the lake. It scared off the eagles and began to eat at the deer carcass. The eagles didn't look pleased! Soon a few Magpies were able to come in and scoop up some bits as the coyote didn't seem to mind them too much.



I was puzzled as to why a full-sized deer would die in the middle of a small frozen lake. I have since found out that deer, especially if being chased, will run out onto a frozen lake. Soon they cannot get far as their hooves are so small and hard that they keep slipping as they lose traction. Apparently, their legs splay out so badly that they dislocate their hips. This is a pretty bleak way to die and it seems doubtful that the eagles killed or finished it off; maybe it collapsed and died of exhaustion. The coyote had not yet arrived, and the feeding by the eagles seemed to be in the early stages.

Fern shares
more sightings and photos -

A pair of mature Bald Eagles on the ice in the bay, this being early March, were very agitated as they chased away another eagle trying to steal their catch, a large fish carcass, possibly a carp.



Bird watching at the pier in Canoe -



A few Redhead Ducks arrived at the pier in Canoe. The pier has been a gem for seeing water birds close up while Salmon Arm Bay was frozen. These very gorgeous ducks only hung around for about a week and then were gone.

They were mixing in with a raft of about 20 Greater Scaup who have been in the area most of February and March. A few Horned Grebes have been in the bay for over a month and a couple of Ring-necked Ducks joined the diving ducks: Coots, Goldeneye, Buffleheads and Trumpeter Swans.

Ring-necked Duck



Further evidence of the wildlife you can find in Canoe - Isobel and Tom, enjoying the dabblers to be seen at the pier.

Further Evidence of Spring's Arrival -



On March 1st the first Great Blue Heron arrived at the heronry near Shoemaker Hill. By March 20th the whole crew had arrived. Immediately they got busy mending nests and building new ones.



Then on March 21st the Sandhill Crane arrived at the White Lake farm. This is the 21st year they have been nesting there. On the same day, Greg Wiebe reported two cranes flying over Grindrod. We assume they were heading for their usual nesting sight at Mara meadows.

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Blast From the Past The Salmon Arm Observer Wednesday, May 16, 2007

Back to nature: *Shuswap Young Naturalists Club members Mark Carson, Robin Webb, Taylor Webster-Locke, and Michael Davey help outdoor mentor Ed Dahl hang a swallow house on a pole along Lakeshore Drive. Now is an opportune time to put up a home for the birds, which are avid consumers of mosquitoes.*