

Shuswap Naturalist Club Newsletter

July 2023

We appreciate everyone's contributions to this newsletter; it's a reflection of how you value and work for nature.

"Wildlife can only be protected by love of compassionate hearts." Mehmet Murat Ildan

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Housing Shortage on the Foreshore?

– Di Wittner report

Is it a desire for more square footage or is there a housing shortage on the foreshore?

Before our cavity nesters got down to serious incubation, I walked the trails several times to get a sense of occupancy. More than 95% of the nest boxes showed some sort of activity: occupancy, defense, or interest. This included the new duck boxes which had very smug tree swallows perched in the entrances. Since then at least three pair of swallows have taken up permanent residence in boxes meant for much larger species. Two pairs of flickers were sparring over the new barn owl box but a week later, a tree swallow had laid claim to it. I've no idea if the swallows will make tidy little nests in the center of these big boxes or if, like House wrens, they will fill the entire space with nesting material. Will they lay more eggs? Tree swallows are notorious for being dreadful housekeepers so will all that extra space also mean less mess? I can't wait to find out at the end of summer!

At least one pair of wood ducks and one pair of flickers are incubating. The duck box that Werner put up on the Cress Creek trail had wood ducks in it well over a month ago. Those young have likely fledged by now.

Sadly, the nest box attached to the nature house was taken over by House sparrows who first killed an incubating swallow and built a nest of top of her and her eggs. Those sparrows have been evicted. I also noticed House sparrows harassing swallows in a box near the parking lot.

There are a number of nest boxes on the fence in front of Heron View homes. (Not ours.) It doesn't look like they are being properly maintained which one resident said was due to the precarious rock scramble that's required to reach them. Property owners are legally obligated to take care of bird boxes or remove them. Since these boxes would make our trail more contiguous, I might reach out to that community for a chat though the thought of adding another half dozen boxes makes me slightly nauseous.

As of this week, some swallow nestlings are near fledging while others are still sitting on eggs. In fact, the foreshore is busy with babies of all sorts including chickadees, nuthatches, and a variety of waterfowl. Other than someone mooring their boat to a nest box pole, (argh!) there hasn't been any human interference so far. The current situation suggests it will be a very productive year for swallows in 2023. Stay tuned!

Our Award Fund - Janet Pattinson reports

We have some details about the status of our fund at the Shuswap Community Foundation that provides the revenue for an award to a Thompson Rivers University student each year. As of today, June 21st, Summer Solstice and National Indigenous People's Day, the contributed capital in the fund is \$24,070.98. Of that \$2,373.67 has recently been donated in memory of Ed McDonald. With investment revenue of \$6,758.26 over the year, the total for the fund is \$30,829.24. This is the amount upon which the revenue for the award is based. This year's rate is 5%. We can all feel joy in being able to support a third-year student in the Bachelor of Natural Resource Science program at TRU. The university allows the faculty time to get well acquainted with the students and choose the recipient in February.

Here is a link to our newly updated fund page: [Janet Pattinson - Shuswap Naturalist Club Bursary - Shuswap Community Foundation \(shuswapfoundation.ca\)](https://shuswapfoundation.ca/janet-pattinson-shuswap-naturalist-club-bursary)

Thank you.

My heartfelt thanks to all who have contributed to our club's award/bursary, especially those who have done so in Ed's memory. As many of you know, this project was very important to him. He felt great pride in the students receiving the award; he said they gave him hope for the future.

Marlene

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Western Grebes in 2023 - Di Wittner report

As members may recall, 2022 was a banner year for grebes in our bay with one of the highest counts ever recorded by our club. I'm happy to report the first count gave me reason to be hopeful for another successful breeding season.

The table below shows a comparison between the two years. As you'll note, the wetlands in the southwest bay near the Cannabis store were full of nesting grebes by the end of May. Many were sitting on nests; some were busy building while others were still courting.

In 2017 the distribution was similar, with disastrous results. Adults that had congregated in that bay were subject to rapidly receding water, forcing them to start over. It looks as though that has happened again in 2023. Just four weeks after the count, the grebes have left those wetlands and disbursed to who-knows-where? Guess we'll find out in another month.

Date of count: May 28, 2023

Viewing Location	Adults	(May 24, 2022 comparison)
Raven	2	6
Christmas Island	4	3
Beaver pond boardwalk	24	5
Wharf	38	144
PJ Park	23	131
Southwest wetlands (beyond trestle bridge)	173	0
Tappen Bay	10	26
Pierre's Point	9	0
Sunnybrae	0	0
Total	283	315



Turtles, Turtles, Rah, Rah, Rah.....

Barbara Raynor reporting

After our last Naturalist Club meeting on June 6th, Ken and I went for a walk along the lakeshore. When we approached the (underwater) trail to Christmas Island we noticed a turtle digging in the sand. Farther down the trail we noticed a second turtle at the edge of the path. We did not get close, as we were sure they were laying eggs and we did not want to disturb them.

The next evening and the evening after that we saw more turtles, and we noticed a large number of other digging spots along the sides of the trail in the gravel. We spoke to Di Wittner, and she said she had seen turtles laying eggs as well.

This sent me to the computer to do some research. I was disturbed to find that much of the information on Google was about how to keep the Western Painted Turtles in a tank, which is illegal.

The Western Painted Turtle is the only freshwater turtle native to B.C. This species is one of the few that is specially adapted to tolerate freezing temperatures for extended periods of time due to an anti-freeze like substance in their blood that keeps their cells from freezing. They are a blue listed species. They can live to be 20-30 years old. The males become sexually mature at four years old, and the females at seven - eight years old. The eggs hatch after an average of 70 days, but the hatchlings can remain in the nest until the following May or June before they emerge. The statistics show that 90% of the nests are lost to predators.

Young western painted turtles feed mainly on tadpoles, insects, crayfish and snails, graduating to bigger prey like fish and frogs as they get older. To give them the energy they need for foraging and mating, these turtles will bask in the sun several times a day to raise their temperature.

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'Egg dropping', captured by Di on the 25th.

Saw this mumma turtle excavate, able to dig only as deep as her little legs would allow. She then dropped five eggs, covered them over and camouflaged the site. Also saw two other turtles doing the same thing. So cool to watch the left, right, left, right digging motions, then in reverse to cover. It felt like such a gift to watch the whole thing.

Christmas Island Gull Nest Count - report by Mandy Moore

Hello fellow bird enthusiasts,

I performed the annual gull nest count at Christmas Island on May 19th, similar to last year's timing (May 22nd). We followed the same methodology as previous years, placing candies in the nests.

This year, Christmas Island was completely flooded out. We were able to walk over to the area where the gulls nested in 2022. Once again, some of the gulls decided to eat the candies or throw them out of the nests, making accuracy more difficult. Many nests were flooded out and the small isolated island, where we observed some gulls nesting the previous year, was completely under water. The number of nests counted was 818, with 1- 5 eggs per nest giving us an average of 2/3 eggs. Last year, 1061 nests were counted but the water levels were low at that time and it is possible that some were flooded out in the future. There appeared to be a slightly higher number of deceased birds with no sign of predation.

Hope you all are well and happy birding!

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Great Blue Heron - Glynne Green

on the Heronry at the base of Shoemaker Hill

I have found only 49 egg shells in the forest this year, and there definitely seem to be fewer nests. (Last year's count was 89.) Not sure why this is, as there were just as many adults flying around the nesting area in late February.

There has been constant predatory activity by two Bald Eagles. There is such noise coming from the heronry, both when the parents are letting out blood-curdling screams at the attacking eagles and when the chicks are demanding to be fed.

Just up the hill on Mt. Ida,
this American Goldfinch



and a huge field of mountain lady'slipper,
at least 100 or more.

Mallory Ridge Outing Report June 1, 2023

by Eleanor Marshall



The first day of June was a lovely day for a leisurely walk exploring Mallory Ridge. This fun group of nine first strolled along trails through a moist shady Douglas Fir and Cedar forest with an understory of falsebox. We then followed a different trail, gaining elevation as we walked through a beautiful forest to the semi-open ridge top. Here was a mix of Douglas Fir and Ponderosa Pines with the ground carpeted by pine grass. This was a beautiful area of lush pine grass glades which not long ago had been a riot of colour with a succession of glacier lilies, western spring beauty, arnica, chocolate lilies and shooting stars to name a few. Many other flowers were seen elsewhere such as tiger lilies, one spotted coral root and mountain lady slippers in different locations. It was

noted that last year the arnica bloomed plentifully for almost two months in sheltered pockets into early July. This year the early flower season was compressed due to drought and early heat. We found an abundance of Queen's Cup and a few elusive wild ginger flowers hiding beneath heart shaped leaves in a moist shaded creek ravine. Later this area will host an impressive wild ginger garden.

We passed by several ponds and small wetlands which are prolific breeding ponds for the Pacific Tree frog. A night walk up on the ridge is unforgettable when the frogs are in full chorus in the various wetlands.

We paused often to listen and look for birds. John posted an impressive eBird list of 30 species for the day and gently encouraged our bird ears and eyes (see <https://ebird.org/checklist/S140168849> for our list).



A special stop on our walk was to see a 200 to 300 year-old Ponderosa Pine covered in bear claw marks as far as one could see high up the trunk. Rubbings and two pine needle bear beds were also to be seen. Many photographs were taken of the group enjoying this impressive giant.

Though we only explored a small part of Mallory Ridge as the focus was on birding and botany, this area boasts of cliff views of Gardom Lake and the Deep Creek Valley, other viewing opportunities, multiple ecosystems and a wildlife corridor contained within three small watersheds.



The nearby community has been trying to get permanent protection of Mallory Ridge since 1980. Recent logging threats have renewed efforts to achieve protection. The Mallory Ridge Advocacy Group has partnered with the Gardom Lake Stewardship Society in this effort. The Gardom Lake Stewardship Society has an excellent website. Please Google "Gardom Lake Stewardship Society". Under the Watershed tab is an educational video, a Preliminary Ecological and Conservation Assessment and Mallory Ridge Protected area Proposal by Wayne McCrory, RPBio and Amber Peters, BSc and other information. We welcome anyone who wishes to come to Mallory Ridge and see this gem for themselves. Contact Eleanor Marshall at toelmarshall@gmail.com.

We have an ongoing petition and encourage members or others to sign this to help us with our advocacy work as we prepare for a presentation to the CSRD whose support is crucial. The petition is on the home page of the Gardom Lake Stewardship Society website.

Our special sighting the next day: Two robins were making a loud ruckus below our front yard and flapping around a maple tree. Upon checking to see what was bugging them we found a Great Grey Owl leisurely preening itself. It eventually flew off after we were treated to a rare close up viewing. That evening we saw it again next door and it flew low over our heads. Apparently, it had nested near the neighbour's house and raised two chicks in February. Maybe some young ones were nearby.

Thanks everyone for a wonderful day and for the many who shared their areas of expertise.



Photos by John G Woods

Skimikin Lake Outing Report June 15, 2023

by Doug Mongerson



Eleven club members met at the main parking lot of the Skimikin Lake Forestry Rec Site on a beautiful Thursday morning. Not too hot nor too cold or wet! After a brief discussion about our options, I was happy to hear the consensus was for doing the big loop all the way around the lake. We walked through the main campground frequently stopping for discussion about the birds, the wild plants, geology and both the human and natural history of this interesting lake.

I was beginning to wonder how long this little excursion was going to take! Perhaps the bird of the day was watching both male and female Red-naped Sapsuckers going back and forth feeding their babies from a near-by "sap ladder" (my word of the day - thanks Di). In due course we did indeed make it back to our cars none the worse for the wear. Unfortunately, there does not yet seem to be any publicly available map to the foot trail around the lake, but it is well-traveled and not too difficult to find your way if you want to give it a try. I would guess it is about five km and takes about four hours.

Dawn McDonald shares photos from the outing:



Forester Moth



an abundance of plant
life,
arnica, queen's cup,
organ grape
and more



Butterflies and one Moth

shared with us by John Woods



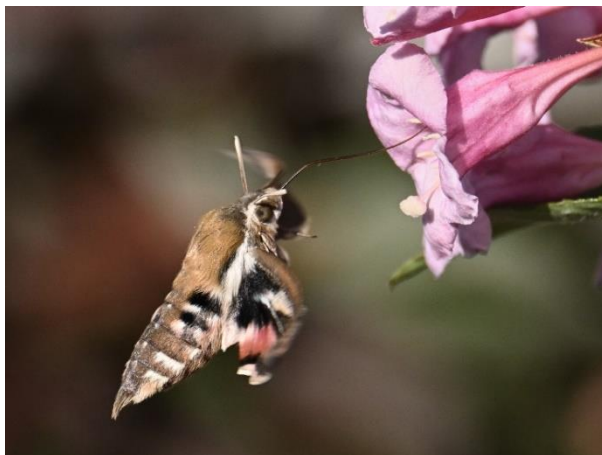
John writes: "I've never seen such a summer for butterflies and moths - they are everywhere! I'm still trying to get in-flight photos of our other species of swallowtail."

So, this something we have to look forward to. Maybe by the end of summer?

Pale Swallowtail (*Papilio eurymedon*)



Zelicaon Swallowtail (*Papilio zelicaon*)



Bedstraw Hawk-moth in flight
(*Hyles galli*)