

January 2024 Newsletter

Greetings of the New Year. As a club, we are looking forward to the year. We are grateful that we have nature to enjoy, to care about, and the ability to share this with each other.

Poet Mary Oliver says, "To pay attention, this is endless and proper work." And this is what we are doing when we participate in the Christmas Bird Count.

Ted Hillary has been in charge of the Salmon Arm Count for 17 years, and we thank him for this, for the dedication he has shown. He has kept us organized, then followed up with all the post count tabulation and reporting. We have enjoyed the reports as he has faithfully shared with us. John Woods has now taken on this task. Thank you John.

Salmon Arm Christmas Bird Count Documents 82 Species

by John Woods

In stark contrast to the bitterly cold conditions last year, our annual Salmon Arm Christmas Bird Count on December 17th saw mild temperatures along with an abundance of birds - 6,751 to be exact!

On count day, 32 volunteers of all levels of birding experience spent an enjoyable time in the outdoors as they tallied 71 species. Another 11 species were seen on "count week" (three days before and after the actual count day).

Not surprisingly, Black-capped Chickadees topped the list as the most frequently observed bird observed by the field teams and the feeder watchers. Canada Goose was the most abundant species (1,691) followed by Mallards (1,044). Open water on Gardom Lake and the snow-free grassy areas along the shoreline of Shuswap Lake and in farm fields, made the Salmon Arm count area a very attractive place for many species of waterfowl. In fact, waterfowl counted for just over 51% of all birds seen this year.

In contrast, the numbers of birds featuring diets of winter berries dropped drastically from the 2022 count. As we've all observed, the Mountain Ash berry crop is almost non-existent compared to last year. Amongst the berry-eating specialists we counted only 1 American Robin (107 in 2022) and 25 Bohemian Waxwings (534 in 2022) and 0 Varied Thrush (253 in 2022).

Our detailed results will become part of the formal North American records and be available to researchers to help them analyze trends in bird numbers through the years.

And of course, any day in the field enjoying nature with others is a good day!

Part of our team at Bergerac Lake in the SE district
L-R: Marcia Woods, Paige Skofteby, Carla Kirkpatrick,
Marie Fortin, Wally Kirkpatrick



photo by John G Woods

More Treasures from the Christmas Bird Count

Barbara Raynor:

Our team is comprised of Peter and Sharon Lawless and Ken and Barbara Raynor. We have a large area to cover so we do a lot of driving.

We stopped at DeMille's market and walked to the very back to count pigeons and house sparrows, but we found so much more! To our right we could see three Bald Eagles sitting in the trees by the river and to our left we saw several swans including six juveniles out in the field.



After we left there, we drove around to the pedestrian bridge and saw several Mallards on the river and just two Bohemian Waxwings sitting on the branch of a Hawthorne tree. We also saw several geese flying overhead.



American Goldfinch

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Hanne MacKay:

We had fewer birds than usual but we saw a lovely flock of 15 Evening Grosbeaks.



Louise Bruns and Mitch Milgram spotting a Pacific Wren.

Geoff Styles and Janet Aitken on Grandview Bench Road.





Gillian Richardson:

We caught up to this little Brown Creeper in Herald Provincial Park as we were doing the NE section of the Christmas Bird Count. It kept on busily checking out the menu while it dodged around the trunk. I was ready with my camera when it reached my side. How lucky to be able to add one more species to our count total.

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Christmas Bird Count Gathering

- by Joyce Henderson

Twenty-three people got together at the United Church for the post Christmas Bird Count party to visit, eat goodies, and hear people's stories of their day. Covid had stopped the post count party for the last few years so it was great to be able to get together once again.

\$230 was raised from the auction and raffle. Mike Saul won the painting of the Yellow-headed Blackbird. Thanks to everyone who donated goodies to eat and items for the auction. Also, thanks to everyone who bid on the auction items.

Plans for next year include once again using the room upstairs at the United Church. Time of the gathering will be 4:00 – 6:00. The first hour will be visiting and bidding on auction items. The auction will close then John Woods will collect information from all the teams who spent the day counting birds.

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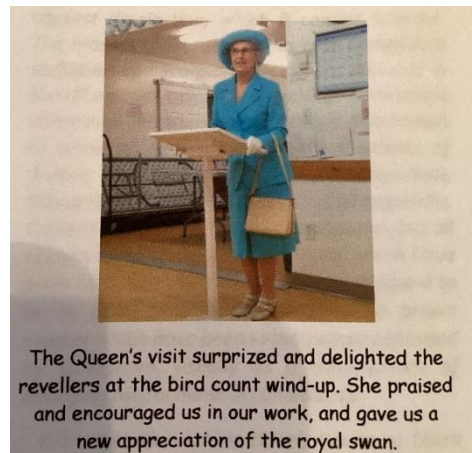


"I have measured my life with coffee spoons."

TS Elliot

The "coffee" breaks contribute to the quality of our regular meetings. Mike and Pam Saul along with Pat Turner have been in charge of the coffee and refreshments at our meetings for many years. We thank them for this plus for their contributions to our other club get-togethers.

Who can forget the entertainment Mike and Pam provided at our bird count get-togethers.



The Queen's visit surprised and delighted the revellers at the bird count wind-up. She praised and encouraged us in our work, and gave us a new appreciation of the royal swan.

Clipping from the February 2018 newsletter

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Note from the February, 2010 minutes -

Ed reported the Antarctic Christmas Bird Count was held for the first time at Cape Crozier on Ross Island. Three counters spotted 5 species, among them over 250,000 Adele penguins.



Christmas Bird Count for Kids

by Molly Cooperman

Our local NatureKids BC club (formerly Young Naturalists Club) explored the Foreshore Trail in Salmon Arm on December 10th. It was a wet day but that did not deter. We had 10 children come with their parents. Programme leaders Molly Cooperman and Carolyn Uher organized the annual event. Local biologist John Woods and Marcia Woods were the local experts. They mentored the children and their parents to identify local birds by sight and sound.

One of the best sightings of the count was a group of five Northern Flickers perched on a tree. The children particularly liked looking through a spotting-scope that gave them a close look at the Northern Flicker. We spotted several Downy Woodpeckers.

Counting the nearly one hundred Mallard Ducks was a challenge for a few.

This was our fifth year doing the count with kids. The final tally was 11 species and 156 individual birds on a three-hour hike covering about 3 km. Results from the count were entered into eBird, a citizen science database that tracks bird observations world-wide.

contact Molly, salmonarm@naturekidsbc.ca.

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Club Member looking for a spotting scope, a note from Doug Mongerson

I think I've gotten to the point in my birding efforts that I need a scope. So many tiny birds so far away! Does anyone have a reasonably good one that they no longer use that they would like to sell me? Doug Mongerson - dsaraholbrook@gmail.com, cell- 250-517-8730

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Salmon Arm Environmental Advisory Committee Report

by Janet Pattinson, our club's representative

The City has a bylaw for trees that has been in the process of revision. The latest draft was presented to the Council at the Development and Planning services committee in November. Since that was open to the public, some residents became aware of it. However, the bylaw changes have not yet been approved by council and there is further opportunity for public input before approval comes.

The EAC heard more about the revisions and offered their thoughts on the latest draft at the December meeting.

There are a few lines that I thought the Naturalists would find interesting. There is a line about the "protection of birds and birds' nests". There is a section with the words "...no tree may be cut...except where its owner holds a valid and subsisting permit to do so." As well there are clarifying points made. Another section mentions, "...no tree located within the 1:200 year floodplain may be cut down..." Again, there are further statements about relevant circumstances.

The City will be undertaking a detailed public engagement process in the new year on the draft bylaw.

Big Trees and Riverside Nature: A Club Adventure

by Glenda Hanna

Who says we can't have an interesting and fun field trip in November?! Fourteen of us spent a wonderful day exploring the Eagle River Nature Trail in Malakwa and the Sicamous River Front Nature Trail; two park trails that border the lovely little Eagle River.



This outing provided outstanding shared leadership and learning: 'Mushroom Mitch', our resident amateur mycologist, introduced us to at least 15 species of fungi and mushrooms; John helped us hear and spot the few birds still around; and Colin explained the geomorphology of the Eagle River.

Mitch Milgram,
sharing his knowledge



Tree Huggers - Gillian Richardson, Marcia Woods,
Carla and Wally Kirkpatrick and Marie Fortin

The Eagle River Nature Park (aka Yard Creek Provincial Park) is representative of the Interior wet-belt ecosystem and features large old growth Western cedar and hemlock trees, lush undergrowth and a rich riparian zone along the Eagle River. While we missed seeing much of the deciduous understory on this late fall outing, the vibrant green mossy forest floor spoke to the abundant moisture held in this forest.



The Eagle River Nature Trail evolved over decades. While Yard Creek campground was established east of the highway back in 1956, it wasn't until 2004 that Yard Creek Provincial Park was extended to the river. The Eagle River Nature Trail was built to add a strong conservation component to the park's role; enhanced by 20 interpretive signs located along the 6 kms of trail sharing the story of the park's ecology.

We were all inspired by the remaining enormous cedar and hemlock trees, by the dozens of stumps with springboard holes in them (where planks were inserted by loggers to stand on while sawing the trees down back in the 1920s and 30s), and by the many nurse stumps, where live trees are growing out of the remnant stumps from long-ago logged trees. Interestingly, the historical record provides evidence of climate change. In 1950, the local school closed all of February because temperatures never climbed above -40 (it doesn't matter if you're talking Celsius or Fahrenheit at that temp!). It's hard to imagine it getting anywhere near that cold in the Shuswap at any time now.



The relative dearth of bird life proved good reason for the group to begin making plans for a return visit here in spring. One avian highlight for the camera and mega-lens laden birding photographers in the group were the ever-cute American dippers, who, as I fervently hoped would still be hanging out along Yard Creek where I'd often seen them before, didn't disappoint. So yeah, whew!

American Dipper,
Colin Spence photo

In addition to another walking tour to these parks in spring, Werner and I are excited that several folks expressed interest in joining us for a paddle down the Eagle River to explore the valley from the vantage point of the waterway. We'll try to time this canoeing daytrip for when the salmon are running (the river hosts sockeye, chinook, and coho) and the eagles are especially active and happy. So, stay tuned!

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Gillian Richardson's photos of the day -

Tiny fungus amid thick mosses covering the ground,
fallen trunks....everything



These are called 'wood rotters',
growing out of fallen, decaying trunks



lungwort lichen



Another photo of one of the
huge cedars logged years ago
- now, are these 'sad eyes'
from the past watching how we are treating the forest?

Snakes and Wheatgrass: The Campbell-Brown Ecological Reserve

by Glenda Hanna

We were excited to explore the Campbell-Brown Ecological Reserve (ER) this fall. This highly accessible reserve is located on the slope of Ellison Ridge overlooking Kalamalka Lake, right off Hwy. 97, about 5 km north of Oyama. This 104 ha ER was created to preserve an example of the transitional ecosystems between Ponderosa pine and Interior Douglas fir, and to protect known Western rattlesnake dens.

We were fortunate to be able to tour the ER with its Volunteer Warden, Linda Kennedy. In 1912, Linda's grandfather settled on the land that is now the reserve. Her father, Dr. Hugh Campbell-Brown, donated the land in 1977 (making this the first ER on donated land in BC). Linda took over stewarding the ER from her father 40 years ago, and at 85, she is still a spry hiker and passionate interpreter of the reserve. We felt the intergenerational connection as we hiked on several rough trails that Linda's father had built when he grazed horses in the area 75 odd years ago; an incongruous treat in our typically untracked ERs.

Linda pointing out a rattlesnake den



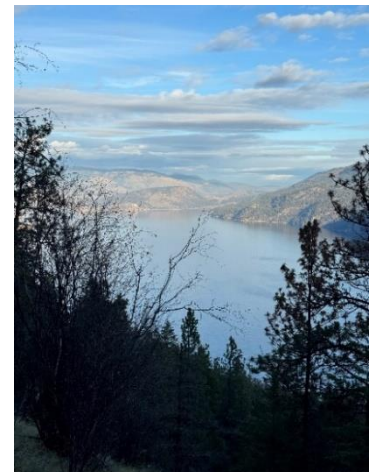
The ER is dominated by open forests of Ponderosa pine and blue-bunch wheatgrass, with Douglas fir more common higher up the ridge. Shrubs included wild and baldhip rose and birch-leaved spirea. We were sad to see invasive Rush skeleton weed taking over the largest meadow in the ER and to spot other aggressive invasive species such as Hounds tongue and Sulphur cinqfoil. Eradication efforts continue.

Blue-bunch wheatgrass

A highlight was seeing a Western Rattlesnake hibernaculum, home to an estimated 25 snakes. Sadly, the population has declined significantly; from 100 snakes at the site in 1993. These snakes emerge in April and den up again in September so we didn't see any of them over our November visit. They prey almost exclusively on voles, deer mice and other small mammals and this northern colony has a low reproductive rate so are threatened by human-caused mortality. Wildlife cams have been posted to help protect the site and people are discouraged from visiting, especially in breeding and birthing seasons.

As the climate get hotter and drier, the forest composition in this reserve is threatened. In fact, despite being in an apparently "protected" Ecological Reserve, we spotted dozens of trees sporting yellow flagging carrying the notation "Wildfire Risk Reduction". To date Linda has been unable to get an answer re: what, if any, plans there are to do wildfire mitigation (i.e., tree thinning) in the ER. Like everywhere in the Okanagan's forests, decades-long fire suppression programs combined with Mountain pine beetle infestations have increased the fuel load and, therefore, the risk of uncontrollable wildfire. We could see concerns arising about a fire getting away right along the major highway running between the ER and Kal Lake. This does raise a very interesting issue: should wildfire mitigation be allowed in ERs?

View of Kalamalka Lake from high in the ER



Membership Dues for 2024

Your membership fees, \$30 for single or \$35 for family, include membership in BC Nature, the BC Nature magazine plus our club's liability insurance. The club keeps about \$5 from a single and \$10 from a family membership. **You are now reminded that for most of us our dues are now due.** You can pay this either in person at our next meeting or send your money to Ted via mail.

Shuswap Naturalist Club Membership Renewal Form 1740 16th St. NE, Salmon Arm, BC, V1E 3Z7

Name/names: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____ Email Address: _____

Membership Type: [] Family - \$35 or [] Single - \$30

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2023 Club Executive and Directors

President: Janet Aitken
Vice-President: Di Wittner
Treasurer: Ted Hillary
Secretary: Gillian Richardson

Anne Caughlin
Janet Pattinson
Barbara Raynor
Ken Raynor
Colin Spence

Current Club Committees

Programs: Anne Caughlin
Membership: Ted Hillary
Communications: Ken Raynor
BC Nature Director: Di Wittner
Website: Dorothy Parks
Newsletter: Marlene McDonald
FaceBook Page: Fern Fennel
Historian: Gillian Richardson
Coffee Conveners:
Isabell Elden, Barbara Raynor
Award /Bursary:
Dorothy Parks, Janet Pattinson
SABNES: Janet Aitken (Pres.)
Grebe Count: Di Wittner
Bird House Project: Di Wittner

Christmas Bird Count: John Woods
Songbird Committee:
Janet Aitken, Gillian Richardson
Bluebird Trail: Fern Fennel
Weedpull Project: Janet Aitken
District Environment Committee:
Janet Pattinson
Naturalist Trail: Greg Wiebe
Outings Committee:
John and Marcia Woods, Cathy Meakes
Young Naturalists: Molly Cooperman
Larch Hills Interpretive Trail:
Pat Danforth, Dawn McDonald,
Anne Caughlan
Blackburn Park: Joyce Henderson