

March 2024 Newsletter

Shuswap Naturalist Club Award

Each year a Thompson Rivers University student in environmental studies is chosen to receive our club award. The university has just informed us, "We are excited to tell you all that this year's recipient is Autumn Smeltzer of the Bachelor of Natural Resource Sciences program who will receive \$1539.00." We will be hearing from Autumn shortly, and will publish that note in the next newsletter.

Donations to this fund through the Shuswap Community Fund are gratefully accepted, and we thank all who have so generously donated to this fund in this past year.

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"Crystalline Plates and Shapes"

John Woods shares this photo

It was taken at Christmas Island on Family Day, February 19th.

"These pressure ridges are a regular feature of late winter ice around Salmon Arm Bay."



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Swans and Eagles on the Shuswap River

Sunday March 17 Outing



John and Marcia Woods and Doug Mongerson will lead this Enderby, Grindrod and Mara area outing.

Meet at 9 a.m. in the parking lot beside Junglemania in Salmon Arm to organize carpooling. We'll be exploring several spots along the Shuswap River including a stop at Wildflight Farms to scan the river and look at First Nations fish weirs. Washrooms will be available at Wildflight.

Trumpeter Swan

Wintering and migrating waterfowl and eagles will be featured and the outing will include several short, level-grade walks along the river. Spotting scopes will allow us to share great views of the birds.

Expect to be back in Salmon Arm by about 2 p.m. Non-members welcome. Difficulty Rating: Easy, level walking, washrooms available.

Janet Aitkens shares this poem -

"Snowy Night"

by Mary Oliver

Last night, an owl
in the blue dark
tossed an indeterminate number
of carefully shaped sounds into
the world, in which,
a quarter of a mile away, I happened
to be standing.
I couldn't tell
which one it was –
the barred or the great-horned
ship of the air –
it was that distant. But, anyway,
aren't there moments
that are better than knowing something,
and sweeter? Snow was falling,
so much like stars
filling the dark trees
that one could easily imagine
its reason for being was nothing more
than prettiness. I suppose
if this were someone else's story
they would have insisted on knowing
whatever is knowable – would have hurried
over the fields
to name it – the owl, I mean.
But it's mine, this poem of the night,
and I just stood there, listening and holding out
my hands to the soft glitter
falling through the air. I love this world,
but not for its answers.
And I wish good luck to the owl,
whatever its name –
and I wish great welcome to the snow,
whatever its severe and comfortless
and beautiful meaning.

From *What Do We Know: Poems and Prose Poems* (Da Capo Press, 2002), pp. 65-66.

Great Grey Owl



Janet Aitkens photo

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Join the Nocturnal Owl Survey -

The British Columbia-Yukon-Northwest Territories Nocturnal Owl Survey monitors trends in owl populations. Participants survey their route at least once a year in March in the southern Interior, (February on the south coast; and April in central and northern BC, the Yukon, and NYT).

Routes consist of 10 to 30 stops positioned 1.6 km apart along secondary roads. At each stop, the observer simply listens for two minutes and notes any owls heard. Each survey takes about one to two hours, plus driving time to and from the survey site. Surveys are done in good weather and completed before midnight.

If you are interested in taking part in this program, contact the BC Projects Coordinator, Rémi Torrenta: rtorrenta@birdscanada.org.

The NOC website is:
https://www.birdscanada.org/bc_yk_nwt_owls

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"It's not what you look at that matters, it's what you see."

Henry David Thoreau



**Birch Maze Gill,
(*Lenzites betulina*)**

A Very Odd Mushroom Season - by Mitch Milgram

2023 was a very unusual mushroom season here in the Shuswap. The summer and fall were hot and dry, and most mushrooms failed to fruit as hoped for in September and October. With some rain in November a few late season fungi began appearing, but then came the colder weather and snow, and I packed away my mushroom notes and gear. And then it got milder, and rained, and for the most part stayed mild. Some park trails in Salmon Arm, particularly Parkhill Trails and Coyote Park Trails, being at lower elevations and closer to the moderating effects of Shuswap Lake, remained snow free. I made records and collections into December, surpassing my previous latest season collection of December 1, back in 2021. I thought that date was remarkable at the time, but to my amazement, this fall I was able to continue observing and collecting well beyond that late date.

I made collections of fresh specimens in the first week of December, then mid month, then right up to Christmas. After each outing I'd pack away my gear thinking, surely this is the end. But no, I collected right up to January 5, 2024, recording at least 20-30 fruiting fungi on each outing. This is exceptional for this area of the BC interior.

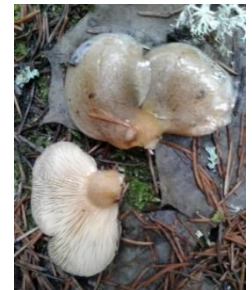


**Witch's Butter,
(*Dacrymyces chrysospermus*)**



**Red Belted Conk,
(*Fomitopsis mouncaea*)**

There were some fungi that weren't a surprise to see, such as the hardy perennial Red Belted Conk, or the leathery Birch Maze Gill, growing on downed logs. Even the colourful jelly fungi, Witch's Butter and Winter Oyster are known to last late into the season.



**Winter Oyster,
(*Sarcomyxa serotina*)**

But what has amazed me are seeing these more fragile and fleshy fungi, in good shape, fruiting throughout this period, withstanding freezing evenings, then continuing to fruit and shed spores during the day.



The **Poison Pie relative, *Hebeloma mesophaeum***, the **Fat Jack (*Suillus caeruleus*)**, the **Waxy Gill (*Hygrophorus agathosmoides*)** and the **Blewit (*Lepista nuda*)** continued to appear.

New snow came on January 6, 2024, and soon afterwards the temperatures plunged. The mushroom season finally came to an end and I packed away my gear for the last time. Each previous year I've been envious of the mushroom enthusiasts in the lower mainland and on the island, collecting often late into December and then in full swing again in February. This year I was happy to have a similar experience.

Can you identify this?

photo by Cathy Gillick
(answer on page 7)



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How swift the hawk?

Gillian Richardson asks

If it is a sharp-shinned hawk, it might reach a top speed of 96.5 kph while in hot pursuit of its songbird prey. But I witnessed its superb agility, this time. Its prey? I'd heard a thump on the patio door, and discovered a downed house finch, obviously stunned, partially hidden under the hanging BBQ cover. It sat upright, though, so I thought it should recover safely given a few minutes, with no cats prowling nearby. Barely a second later, a 'sharpie' flashed across the deck so fast I only got a glimpse of short wings and long tail both fanned wide....then, gone. And so was the unfortunate finch!

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Earth Day

Planet vs. Plastics, theme for 2024

Earth Day is April 22nd, and EARTHDAY.ORG is unwavering in its commitment to end plastics for the sake of human and planetary health, demanding a 60% reduction in the production of ALL plastics by 2040.

Note from Janet Pattinson -

This year the Naturalists will be joining many other community groups in celebrating Earth Day on Saturday, April 20th at the Ross Street Plaza where we regularly see the Farmers' Market in the summer. It will be from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm. The Market sponsors will be focused on food security in the Shuswap. The Shuswap Climate Action Society will focus on the harmful effects of plastic and how people can take action on that front. Naturalists will be able to tell the community about our love for the natural world. It should be a very interesting gathering!

BIRDING FOR FAMILIES

FREE

PRESENTED BY
NATUREKIDS BC, SHUSWAP NATURALIST CLUB AND THE
SALMON ARM BAY NATURE ENHANCEMENT SOCIETY

Shuswap Naturalist Club

ENJOY A MORNING WALK ON THE WHARF WITH LOCAL NATURE EXPERTS. BRING YOUR FAMILY AND LEARN ABOUT WESTERN GREBES AND OTHER WATERFOWL. WE'LL HAVE SPOTTING SCOPES TO HELP CHILDREN AND ADULTS GET GREAT VIEWS OF COMMON BIRDS.

2024 DATES
APRIL 21, APRIL 28, MAY 5, AND MAY 12

TIME
9:00AM TO 11:00AM

LOCATION
SABINES NATURE HOUSE PARKING LOT
SALMON ARM WHARF

NO REGISTRATION REQUIRED

JOIN
NATUREKIDS BC

NATURE KIDS BC
WWW.NATUREKIDSB.CA

WWW.SHUSWAPNATURALISTS.ORG

WWW.SABINES.ORG



Field Trip Report

Raven Trail
Sunday, February 11th
Leaders: John and Marcia Woods

Despite dire warnings of an approaching snowstorm, moderate to heavy fog and a gentle, but persistent drizzle, Mitch Milgram joined us at the trailhead. Optimistic about the weather, the three of us set out to explore the trail and Christmas Island on a quiet Sunday morning. Our first impression in the parking lot was “this isn’t as bad as we expected”! Given the weather, almost no-one else was on the trail.

Our first wildlife observation was a male Ring-necked Pheasant giving his harsh “creek” calls while he waded through snow. Given the fog-softened lighting, his colours were magnificent.

We then entered the “Mallard-zone” with its 50+ habituated Mallards marching in a gang towards us!

Mallard feet on path



The cattails were generally quiet except for a male Red-winged Blackbird proclaiming that spring was on the way, no mind the weather! In the cattails two or three Song Sparrows gave their distinctive but harsh contact calls. As we headed out to the Island carrying a spotting scope seemed a bit silly—there was no visibility. However, we did manage to see a small flock of flying male Common Mergansers emerge from the mists for a few seconds before they were lost again in snow and fog.

With snow still accumulating, the trees and shrubs around us metamorphosed from bare branches to lines and patterns highlighted by snow crystals. We paused numerous times to enjoy the enchantment of fog, snow and quiet.

Douglas Maple seeds



We also transformed from bird-watchers to winter botanists as we worked out the identities of trailside trees and shrubs. This quickly confirmed that we were all in need of a tune-up in this department!

By 11:00 we were back in the parking lot with the healthy glow that comes from being out there experiencing nature on a quiet Sunday morning.

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“The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the eyes of others only a green thing that stands in the way.” William Blake

A Greek proverb - A society grows great when old men plant trees whose shade they know they shall never sit in.



Spring Mushrooms

by Mitch Milgram

When and where mushrooms appear can often seem random, and to some extent it is. Their fruiting can be affected by variables such as moisture and temperature, by their symbiotic relationship with surrounding trees, and a multitude of other factors. But like most fruits and vegetables, many mushrooms have a specific fruiting season. Spring is one season, and spring mushrooms are particularly appreciated after a long barren winter, delighting mushroom enthusiasts

Morchella

The fact is, most mushrooms fruit in the fall, fewer in the spring and summer. This is a bit of a mystery. One would think that just as most vascular plants flower and set fruit in the warmer temperatures and rains of spring and summer, fungi would too. Yet fall is the main season for mushrooms. Perhaps a reason for this is that it takes more time for the fungi to gather the resources to fruit. Perhaps it's the fall rains and the infusion of carbon and resources transferred to the fungi living in close symbiotic relationship with the roots of trees. As the trees start their fall hibernation and move their resources down below ground to the roots, the fungi have a boost to their reproductive ability. Whatever the reason for fall's bounty, those fungi that do fruit in the spring are that much more appreciated.

Some of the most well-known spring mushrooms are the morels, (species) and 'false' morels (*Gyromitra* and *Helvella* species). Because of the publicity around the huge morel fruitings in wild fire sites, some people are surprised that morels occur 'naturally', that is, that they will appear almost anywhere in the spring, although in far fewer numbers. ***Gyromitra esculenta***, the 'brain mushroom', is one of the false morels and often appears a little before the true morels, indicating that the soil temperature will soon be warm enough for the morels to fruit. Interestingly, false morels are consumed by some people, even though they are highly toxic, containing poisonous compounds such as gyromitrin. Gyromitrin is toxic when eaten, especially raw, and even the vapours produced when cooking are harmful.



Gyromitra esculenta



Another sought after spring mushroom for people interested in edibles is the oyster mushroom. The principal one in our area is ***Pleurotus populinus***, and as the name suggests, it fruits on poplar trees. Oyster mushrooms are saprobes, decomposers, and they'll appear for a few years in succession on a dead or dying poplar tree until they've extracted the nutrients they seek. Some people, finding a fruiting log, will transport it home to their backyard to harvest successive flushes of mushrooms.

Pleurotus populinus

Another interesting mushroom that will fruit in the spring (though it can fruit in other seasons as well), is *Agaricus bitorquis*, the 'Urban *Agaricus*'. This is a large, robust white mushroom in the same genus as our familiar white button mushroom found in the supermarket. *Agaricus bitorquis* comes by its common name because you'll often see it in surprising places as you walk around in urban settings, erupting in crowded clumps in disturbed soil, in garden beds, along road verges and sidewalks, even pushing up through asphalt. It's a good edible mushroom, commercially cultivated in Europe, but because of the conditions in which it fruits, it's seldom suitable for consumption. Mushrooms are like sponges, absorbing moisture and minerals, but because *Agaricus bitorquis* fruits often in questionable soils, it can often be laced with harmful heavy metals.



The coral mushrooms are colourful and distinctive, reminiscent of sea coral. They come in a wide variety of colours, and the bright yellow branches of the Spring Corals are an exciting sight as they erupt in the spring. Though many corals fruit later in the season, ***Ramaria rasilispora*** and *Ramaria magnipes* are two corals that fruit in the spring. With their many branched heads and thick fleshy bases they at times resemble cauliflowers.

Ramaria rasilispora

'Snowbank' mushrooms are another group of spring mushrooms. This is a general term applied to a variety of mushrooms that fruit in the spring, generally in subalpine settings, at the edge of melting snowbanks. Taking their nourishment from the melting snow in what is often a harsh, dry environment, snowbank mushrooms will appear as soon as the snow melts, often even before it has melted, emerging right through the ice crystals. Some of the more well known snowbank mushrooms are the 'Snowmelt Clitocybe', *Clitocybe albirhiza*, and the 'Snowbank Orange Peel' mushroom, ***Caloscypha fulgens***, a vivid orange cup fungi that will stain blue. Spring subalpine snowbank mushrooms may not appear until July, thus extending the spring mushroom season.



Caloscypha fulgens

There are numerous other spring mushrooms, with names like *Hygrocybe vernalis*, and *Nolanea verna*. Their species epithet of 'vern' means Spring in Latin. Whatever their name, the arrival of these fungi in the spring is the long awaited and appreciated signal of the start of another exciting mushroom season.

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Early morning dew on grass
in Wood Buffalo National Park, NWT