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July 2024 Newsletter

Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth
find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts.

Rachel Carson

A Special Day with Barbara Raynor

Have you ever had one of those days that just exceeds expectations? Ken and I had our usual walk along the lake shore and decided to go out to Christmas Island. This time of the year we usually avoid it to leave the Ring-billed Gulls in peace while they nest, but we decided we could just stick to the west end.



As we walked out, we could hear the Western Grebes calling. Then we noticed the swallows! There were so many of them, flying all around us. They were also perching in a dead tree, I think I counted 27 of three different species, all sitting in the tree. What a great chance to use the Merlin App on our phones and learn who was making which call. Eventually Ken had enough pictures and we walked on. Then it was the sparrows. Savannah Sparrows everywhere, a few Song Sparrows, White-crowned, and a couple of Vesper Sparrows (that we had never seen before)

Eventually we got out to the outside of the island to see the Grebes. There must have been over 200. They seemed to get each other excited and dance together. One time we saw six pairs all dancing at the same time. Needless to say, we sat there for quite a while watching, and taking pictures.

As we walked back, we saw Green-Winged Teals in all their beautiful colours, Great Blue Herons, an American Coot, Killdeer, a Yellow-rumped Warbler, an Osprey, Gadwalls, and two Canada Geese taking on a Juvenile Eagle. The Eagle took off, they were not worth the effort.

Just another great day in the Shuswap.

Ken Raynor's photos

Violet-green Swallow
Northern Rough-winged
Swallow
Tree Swallow



Dancing Grebes at the Wharf

Field Trip Report by Barbara Raynor, with Ken's photos
Sunday May 26th, 2024

Leaders: Barbara and Ken Raynor

We had a turn out of 19 people, only five were current members. We had a family from Kamloops with three children and a couple from Vancouver, who had seen the event advertised. Thank you to Carla for getting the word out! When we were waiting in the parking lot it was warm and mostly sunny, but when we started talking at 10:00, the skies were darkening and it started to get cold. However, the rain held off until we were done our walk to the Wharf.



It was a quiet day in the bay. The children spotted a Great Blue Heron near the shore and as we walked down the wharf we saw two Mallards and a pair of Gadwalls. Ken and I were getting worried, but just then 2 Grebes swam over. They were very good about showing off their mating rituals, fishing prowess and their croaky call, but alas, they were not in the mood for dancing. We only saw one other Grebe. I explained that they were probably over the railway bridge and suggested that they might want to visit Jannink Park later.

We were entertained by eagles. In the parking lot we watched an eagle do several barrel rolls trying to get rid of the Osprey that was chasing it. Later, out on the wharf we saw eight eagles, mostly up high and mostly juvenile. There was quite a show when a gang of crows took on an eagle, the children especially like that.

As usual the swallows were plentiful and entertaining to watch. It was cold enough that the turtles stayed tucked away.

I felt badly for the couple from Vancouver. The husband had pictures on his phone of dancing grebes that his friend had taken in Salmon Arm. He and his wife had driven up just to see the grebes. When Ken and I went over to Jannink Park later, we did see two groups who had taken our suggestion and walked/drove over as well. That's where the grebes were, at the railway bridge, but so far away, you really need a scope to see them, which we set up for a few people.

Not the best birding we have had at the wharf, but a walk out into the lake is always a great way to start the day.

Grebes dancing on April 28th



Hanne MacKay asks -

Does anyone know what this is?

This moth was in my garden on May 2. It was about nine inches across! I have never seen a moth this big. So beautiful!



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Gull Nest Count

Mandy McDiarmid writes -

Hello fellow bird enthusiasts,

I conducted the annual gull nest count at Christmas Island on May 25th. We followed the same methodology as previous years, placing candies in the nests. Unlike last year, when Christmas Island was completely flooded, we were able to walk out to the island this time. However, some gulls ate or discarded the candies, which made accuracy more challenging.

Notably, a larger number of nests were empty, and many eggs were found outside the nests, a phenomenon I haven't observed before. There were also numerous predated eggs, likely due to predators easily accessing the island with low water levels. The small, isolated and inaccessible island had gulls nesting again this year. We had to estimate for that area.

We counted 722 nests, with 1-5 eggs per nest, averaging about 2-3 eggs each. Last year, we counted 818 nests.

Hope you all are well and happy birding!

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The Heronry at the base of Shoemaker Hill

Glynn Green reports -

There were five or six active nests this year. I counted 38 empty shells at the end of April. (Last year's count was 49, with 89 in 2022.)

They were getting quite loud by early June as the young were demanding food. I am happy to report that they seem to be doing well.



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Hanna's Moth - Is it a Ceanothus?

A Ceanothus is a silk moth. Its host plants include gooseberry, willow and alder. Did you know, large moths don't feed? They don't have a mouth.

Revelstoke Field Trip - In Search of the American Redstart

Thursday June 6th, 2024

Leader and Field Trip Report: John Woods

Photos by Colin Spense and Gillian Richardson

Although Revelstoke is “just down the road” from Salmon Arm, as we all know, it has a distinctly different climate, geography and animal life. And once again, our trip there didn’t fail to produce sunny skies, little wind, and an abundance of birds.

We started in the floodplain along the Illecillewaet River at the Selkirk Saddle Club where the abundance of bird song was almost overwhelming—more than a dozen species with almost none of them in view as they sang from the richly foliated cottonwood canopy. Our primary objective was to see the tropically-plumaged, yet elusive, American Redstart and to learn its equally hard to remember song.



Looking for little birds in big trees

Patience and time focused our eyes as the morning symphony revealed its players: Veery, Swainson Thrush, Red-eyed Vireo, Least Flycatcher, Lazuli Bunting, and of course, American Redstart by the bushel—our eBird report listed the number we saw or heard at 40+. Soon everyone had seen a full breeding plumage male, heard its song many times over, and thanks to “Eagle-Eye” Cathy Meakes, we watched a female building its nest.



American Redstart,
nest building



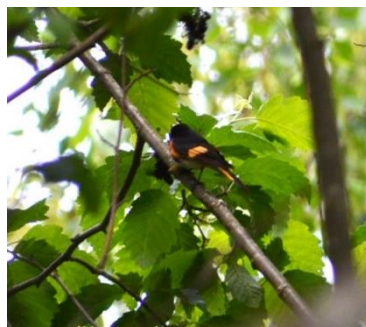
Colin taking pictures of the Redstart



Female and singing male



Gillian's pictures
of the male Redstart
and the nest
on the side of the tree



After lunch we moved for a shorter walk along the Illecillewaet River Greenbelt where we enjoyed more bird-song including that amazing songster the Gray Catbird, along with a large flock of Pine Siskins and many Cedar Waxwings.

Colin's photo of Cedar Waxwing



By the end of the day, our group of ten (eight members and two guests from Revelstoke) had tallied 38 species that we reported in two eBird checklists you can see at <https://ebird.org/tripreport/249365>.

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Birds Featured on Field Trip to the Turtle Valley Donkey Refuge

Thursday June 13th, 2024

Leaders: Bob and Sandra Ewart

Photos by Janet Aitken

Sunny skies and calm winds combined with the generosity of the Turtle Valley Donkey Refuge made for an extremely enjoyable club field trip for 17 club members on June 13th. After a brief welcome by Refuge staff, we were treated to a pleasant stroll under the leadership of Bob and Sandra Ewart who took us through the Refuge's amazingly productive bottomlands.



Along the stream we saw an active beaver dam and birds sang from every direction.



Cedar Waxwing



During our lunchbreak on shaded picnic tables (within easy access to a first-class outhouse!) we watched Mountain Bluebirds and Say's Phoebes making fly-catching sorties while Savannah Sparrows sang in the background.

Mountain Bluebird



Donkey with two Brown-headed Cowbirds

After lunch, refuge co-founder Rob Miller gave us a very informative tour of the donkey barns featuring many details on their donkey-care programme. Braying donkeys punctuated our guide's explanations with their amazing voices—each a commanding soloist. We also learned about the professional and compassionate donkey-rescue work the Refuge undertakes for these unique animals that often out-live their owners.

Natural history highlights Bob showed us included numerous singing Common Yellowthroats and Willow Flycatchers, a patch of locally-rare Blue-eyed Grass just coming into bloom along with late-blooming patch of stunningly beautiful Mountain Lady-Slippers.



Gerry Schellenberg's photo -
Blue-eyed Grass (*Sisyrinchium idahoense*)



John's photo -
Mountain Lady-Slipper
(*Cypripedium montanum*)



Our complete list of 32 species is logged into eBird at:
<https://ebird.org/checklist/S181516264>

Mallory Ridge Field Trip

Sunday June 9th, 2024

Field Trip Leaders: Tom and Eleanor Marshall

Report: John Woods

Mallory Ridge is a special place for many reasons—but one of the best is that it is you can listen to birds and other sounds of nature without hearing a background of highways and railways. Our club field trip on June 9th didn't let us down as Tom and Eleanor Marshall and I were treated to a symphony of bird song with only sounds of nature in the ensemble.

Vireos stole the acoustical show with three species singing, often at the same time--Cassin's, Red-eyed and Warbling. You can see the full programme of bird performers on our eBird list for the day at:

<https://ebird.org/checklist/S180510297>.

If you bring up this list (control-click the link), you will be able to scroll down to a Red-eyed Vireo and play the sound file of our recording.

In the botany department, Queen's Cup (*Clintonia uniflora*) blossoms carpeted the forest floor and we enjoyed peeking at the spectacular hidden blossoms of Wild Ginger (*Asarum caudatum*) blooming in wet areas.

Queen's Cup (*Clintonia uniflora*)
Eleanor Marshall's photo



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Western Grebe Report - May 2024

by Di Wittner

It's hard not to care about our grebes more than we probably should. After all, they've been around a long time, survived lake extremes and human development. *So far.*

After last year's disastrous offspring failure, I approached this year's preliminary count with a mix of dread and optimism. Turns out, we have reason to be hopeful.

Western Grebe Count

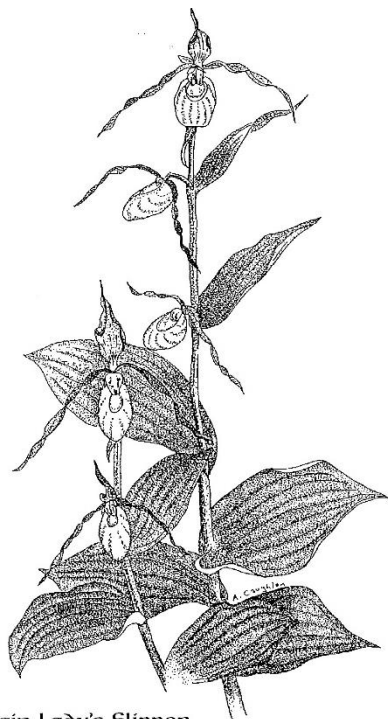
Date of count: May 26, 2024

Start time: 6:10 am

Viewing Location	Adults
Raven	0
Christmas Island	8
Beaver boardwalk	2
Wharf east/local	8
Wharf north (deep water)	73
Wharf west/PJ park	126
Tappen Bay	2
Sunnybrae	0
Total	219

Counting notes:

- Good conditions: sunny, calm, no boat traffic
- Some grebes are already hiding among the reeds so 'actual' number could be slightly higher.



Mountain Lady's Slipper
Cypripedium montanum

Mountain Lady's Slipper - (*Cypripedium montanum*) from Anne Caughlin

This lovely wild orchid grows in our back yard, to my immense delight. Fortunately, I live where it likes to grow. The Mountain Lady's Slipper is one of the eight or so orchids that grow in the area of the Okanagan/Shuswap/Monashee and Similkameen regions either at elevation or at bog level. These are at their best in April and May.

It grows about 60cm tall and as the name suggests, the lower petal forms a pouch shaped lower lip. There are one to three flowers per stem, white with purple markings and they have a faint but sweet fragrance. The genus name, *Cypripedium* is from the Greek *kupris* for Aphrodite and *pedilon* for slipper.

According to Nancy Turner, the Nlaka'p'mx and Secwepemc called this plant 'buck' because the lance-shaped sepals resemble antlers. The Okanagan called them 'moccasins' and used the steeped stalks and leaves as medicine. It is said that pregnant women would drink the concoction to ensure having a smaller baby. This may require more research.

As most guide books caution, although some people try to transplant and cultivate this lovely plant, it prefers its wild nature. Please leave these now rare plants alone. Enjoy the magic and the mystery of the pale colours and delicate blossoms with respect.

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

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Cats!

Janet Pattinson reports -

There has been discussion over a few weeks about the cats that pose a risk to the songbirds. Sylvia Lindgren, Chair of the City's Environmental Advisory Committee, has been alerted and has just added a discussion of cats to the September agenda. The city bylaw for animals does not mention cats and is very much out-of-date.

The BC SPCA is also concerned for both songbirds and cats and has been seeking to get municipal governments to improve their bylaws to include cats. Their issues have to do with spay and neuter of cats, permanent identification and cat safety. At large cats are at risk of predators, vehicles and disease. In their humane education they urge people to keep their cats indoors and offer suggestions for keeping the cats entertained!

At the September meeting SABNES and Naturalists will have the opportunity to point out why the city needs to deal with roaming cats.

Mitch Milgram asks -

What Is A "Natural" Landscape? The Gary Oak Woodlands of Vancouver Island



This May I attended a gathering of botanists for the annual Botany BC weekend, held this year in the Nanaimo area. As part of the program, we had the opportunity to visit the Cowichan Gary Oak Preserve, a piece of land purchased by the Nature Conservancy of Canada to help preserve one of the few remaining places that feature a Gary Oak grassland environment.

Gary Oak

When settlers first arrived on Vancouver Island they were greeted by vast oak parkland landscapes

on the south eastern side of the Island. These landscapes were the work of the Island's First Nations, who regularly managed their territories by periodic burnings. The burning helped to clear the understory and encourage the growth of the Camus lilies, whose bulbs were an important food source. Keeping the understory clear likely also made hunting easier. There was a similar situation that greeted early settlers on the east coast of North America, where they were quite amazed to find vast tracts of open woodlands populated by groves of edible nut trees, native chestnuts, walnuts and hickories. They failed to realize that this wasn't random, but was the intentional management by the local first nations. This practice is now referred to as 'forest gardening'.



Sea blush and camas lilies
(*Plectritis congesta*)



As the Gary Oaklands of Vancouver Island were settled, the settlers' fire suppression practices resulted in a transformation. Both native and European invasive species invaded. Since the Nature Conservancy of Canada took over the management of this land parcel, their aim has been to restore the land to its "natural state". But what is its natural state? Is "natural" the managed landscapes of the First Nations of 150 years ago? It seems sensible that the Conservancy has worked hard to get rid of the highly invasive European Scotch Broom.

Scotch Broom

However, it struck me as odd to hear of the efforts to push back the encroachment of natural, native plants like Snowberry and Douglas Fir. Snowberry is being uprooted and mowed; Douglas Fir trees are being girdled. It's interesting to reflect on how our native species can be viewed as invasive species.

Whether you view these woodlands as natural or managed, they're a unique and lovely landscape, especially in the spring when the ground is carpeted in wildflowers.