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September 2024 Newsletter

We thank those who have contributed to this newsletter, as we thank all our members who continue to work for the club and for nature in general.

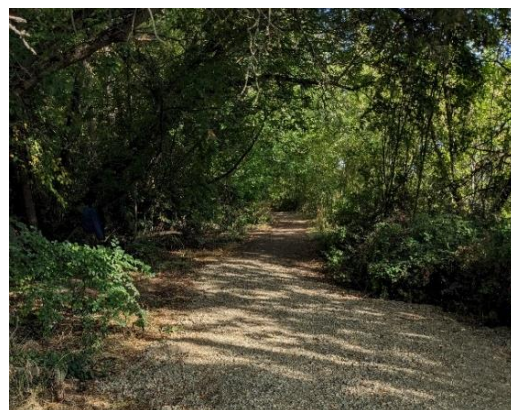
"Everyone's task is as unique as his specific opportunity to implement it."

Viktor Frankl

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We will miss Greg -

We were saddened by the recent passing of Greg Wiebe, from Grindrod, an SNC member since 2002. You'll remember Greg for his friendly smile, his eager participation in our weed pulls on the foreshore, and the favourite old car, a 1952 Ford Customline, he drove to our meetings. From 2003 on, he was a dedicated monitor for the Shuswap Naturalist Club Trail (and bird blind when it was still there), near the Prestige Inn, keeping the woody nightshade under control there. In the fall of 2004, he became Admiral Wiebe as he piloted a party boat full of club members on a day's outing to Anstey Arm. Greg always had fascinating bits of knowledge to share, and we'll miss his presence in our group.



note and photo, Gillian Richardson

Shuswap Naturalist Club Trail
(Kime Trail)

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Can you identify this species?

John Woods' photo,
July 24th
at the base of the wharf.

We all know this is a Great Blue Heron, but can you identify the fish about to disappear down its throat?

For now, John is simply labelling this:
Great Blue Heron with "Flying Fish".



Shuswap Naturalist Club Meeting Schedule and Volunteer Request

We are excited to share our meeting schedule for the 2024-2025 year and invite everyone to join us, whether you are a member or not. Feel free to bring a friend along to experience the wonders of nature with us!

Meeting Schedule for the 2024-2025 Year:

Tuesday, September 3, 11:00 AM - Meet at the park in front of Sunnybrae Hall. Bring your bag lunch, a drink, and your lawn chair. Di Wittner will be the Chair.

First Tuesday of every month at Salmon Arm Senior Secondary Library at 7:00 PM:

- October 1
- November 5
- December 3
- No meeting in January
- February 4
- March 4 - Annual General Meeting
- April 1 - (no fooling!)
- May 6
- June 3, 2025 - 4:00 PM (outdoor meeting) at Barb and Ken Raynor's backyard, 1980 24th St. NE, Salmon Arm. Bring a snack and your lawn chair.

Volunteer Requests:

A special thank you to all our volunteers for their hard work and dedication! We couldn't do it without you.

1. Speaking of volunteers, we are currently in need of a new webmaster. If you're interested, please get in touch with Janet Aitken at janetaitken1@gmail.com.

2. Barb Raynor and Isabell Elden will be handling coffee and tea each meeting. We will need two volunteers to bring goodies to share with the members, starting in November. If you can volunteer, please contact: Barb at baraynor@telus.net.

*** Please bring your own cup.*

3. The Outings Committee is also looking for another member. This group helps scout out possible places to take members.

Please contact John Woods if you are interested: woods@telus.net

Looking forward to seeing everyone at our meetings!

Warm regards,
Janet Aitken, President

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The trees we planted in Blackburn
Park are doing well.

The Mountain Ash is from
Marten Albrecht.
Keith Cox grew the Douglas Maple
from seed he collected on Mt. Ida.

Joyce Henderson photos



Larch Hills Outing

Sunday June 30th, 2024

Leader: Mitch Milgram

Field Trip Report with Mitch's Photos



Broad-Leaved Twayblade
(*Listera convallarioides*)

It rained long, hard and steadily on June 30th, and consequently it was only Doug Mongerson who joined me to visit our local gem, Larch Hills. Despite the rain it was a very interesting foray as we walked along the edge of one of the bogs and then walked through a section of the old growth forest. These are two very different environments and each had a variety of interesting plants.

Along the edge of the bog were a variety of plants in the orchid family, white and green bog orchids, yellow coralroots and twayblades.



Trapper's tea, bog buckbean and carnivorous sundews grow in the wet areas, whereas the old growth trail had a completely different character.

Trapper's Tea
(*Ledum glandulosum*)



Buckbean
(*Menyanthes trifoliata*)

Higher and drier, here the forest canopy towered overhead, with massive cedars, hemlock, Douglas fir and white pines. Below, the understory was lush with ferns - bracken, lady, oak and rattlesnake ferns.

I think Larch Hills is a special place, and with all its accessible trails it's always a treat to wander there. I'll offer this trip again next year and hopefully more club members can share this experience.



Skunk Cabbage
(*Lysichiton americanus*)

Oak Fern
(*Gymnocarpium dryopteris*)





Antheraea Polyphemus

Polyphemus, a Giant Silk Moth - shared by Sharon Lawless

I found a cocoon last fall on our deck. It was attached to the side of the house and a plastic water jug. I eased it off the house and cut it off the jug, put it in a very large jar and put it in the corner of the dining room where it was cooler and somewhat dark. I checked it all winter and into spring. One day the moth emerged and what a beauty it was. I transferred it to a small box and took it down our street to Geoff Styles at South Canoe Outdoor School. He was delighted with the find and took it around to all the classrooms in the school.



My research helped me identify it as an *Antheraea Polyphemus*, also known as a giant silk moth, also labeled Duchess of Dirt.

The moth's cocoon.

Note its tiny hole, amazing for this five-inch moth.

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The Battle with Woody Nightshade Continues

Janet Aitken reports

We had a very good weed pull on the 21st. I think there were 66 bags which includes the work done the previous day. We pulled 37. The official count at the landfill was 885 kg over the two days.



There were three CISS staff, Alex from Nature Trust, two volunteers from Revelstoke, one from Chili and one from Ecuador, plus Clea Roddick, a volunteer that Jess connected with in Salmon Arm. Barb and Ken Raynor, Di Wittner and I represented our club. A lot of our usual crew were away.

We did well and had fun doing it. Perfect temperature, a great day all around. The woody nightshade is a force to be reckoned with!

Happy and dirty after a good work day.
Photo is missing Alex and James.

Land of Fire and Ice

by Di Wittner

Wells Gray Provincial Park in July; what could be more beautiful? This park has to be one of BC's best kept secrets. In my year of discovery, I've visited the park a dozen times and I've yet to see a crowded parking lot or a long queue of traffic.

Twenty guests – plus our Kamloops hosts - gathered at the TRU research facility, July 11th to 14th. The event was a BC Nature 'camp', an occurrence that used to happen with greater frequency before COVID reared its ugly head.

Guest speakers and outings highlighted the schedule. We were treated to catered food, a forested conference setting and warm hospitality.

Stunning Spahats Falls.

Photo courtesy of Jane Cameron



The first evening's presentation by Dr. Catherine Hickson covered the geologic history of the park. (Did you know there were once eleven sub-glacial volcanoes in Wells Gray?) The following day, she and Dr. Tom Dickinson toured us on a day-long field trip of the park's most famous waterfalls, ending with a glorious view of Clearwater Lake. I learned a ton, including a fascinating account of the relatively recent discovery of a 'Honking Big Cave'! (Google that exact term; you'll discover a very cool international news story.)

Friday night's presentation by Bevan Ernst helped me better understand the province's current conservation efforts to protect woodland caribou. The dynamics between wolves, moose, human development and caribou habitat is a lot more complicated than I thought.

On Saturday, we headed to Trophy Meadows where participants had a choice between artistic expression at a lower elevation or continuing on an alpine hike to Sheila Lake. Botanist, Dr. Lyn Baldwin, led the first part of the trip. Her knowledge made my brain explode! Budding artists in the group stayed with her in the meadows where they dabbled among flowers, mountain vistas and mosquitoes. The scenery was breathtaking; there had to be millions of flowers on display. Hikers continued on to the Sheila Lake overlook where we ate lunch and *were* lunch for horseflies. Regardless of the biting insects, views of Trophy and Raft Mountains were spectacular. I even managed a brief snowball fight ... in shorts, no less.

Saturday evening, we visited the breath-taking property of lichenologist, Trevor Goward and gardener extraordinaire, Curtis Bjork. In this nature lover's paradise, named Edgewood Wild, our group discussed

the bleak-looking future of the planet and how members of BC Nature can do more to protect the sublime wilderness so many of us covet.

Sunday was a day of individual exploration and fond farewells. I made a few new friends and fell even more in love with this pristine wonderland! Many thanks to the hard-working folks at the Kamloops club who catered to our every need and made us feel welcome.

Picturesque vistas of Trophy Meadows and surrounding mountains, enroute to Sheila Lake.
Photo courtesy of Jane Cameron.





Local NatureKids BC Clubs Tree Planting for BC Rivers Day by Molly Cooperman

It has been several years since the local NatureKids BC clubs have been able to do their annual tree planting for BC Rivers day. This year they are excited to be planting again in Tsútswecw Provincial Park on September 22, 2024. The more tree planters the better.

Thanks to several organizations such as Interfor, SASCU, The Adams River Salmon Society, BC Parks, and others this important event is back.

They are asking for more families to join this free event. Everyone will meet at The Adams River Salmon Society cabin at 1pm for a Welcome song. Volunteers young and old will help to plant trees in the park for several hours.



Then, there will be opportunities to learn about salmon from local interpreters. If you need more information, send an email to salmonarm@naturekidsbc.ca.

Joy Gaynor showing her tree at a past tree planting event.

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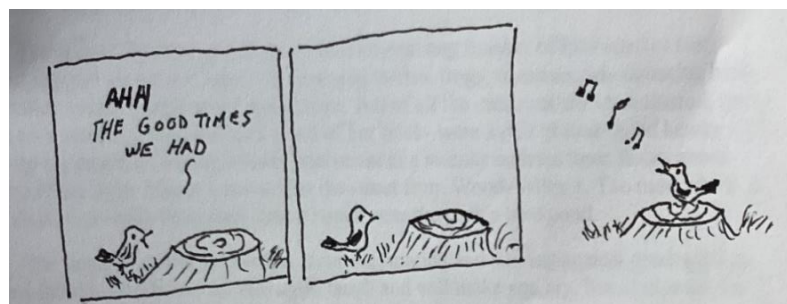
Western Grebe Update - by Di Wittner

If you've read John's newspaper article you already know our grebes did well this year. After a dismal 2023 - producing just eleven young - things turned out much better in 2024.

On July 31st, I counted 242 adults and 153 young. On that day, the majority were in shallow water around the circumference of the bay. Lighting was excellent, boaters were few and far between, and waves were non-existent; in other words, ideal conditions for counting. A few families with older chicks were well offshore. Tappen Bay had 19 adults with only one young one.

For comparison purposes, in 2023 the end-of-summer total was 278. 2024's total, on the other hand, is 395. Now that we exchange grebe info with the Vernon club, (see their newsletter, distributed earlier this month) the combined number gives us reason for optimism (198 adults and 82 chicks in the northern arm of Okanagan Lake). One can't help but wonder if the two groups exchange any portion of their population. Research indicates Western grebes exhibit high site fidelity which means they tend to return to the same lake year after year. Maybe our new MOTUS tracker will verify or refute that theory. Fun!

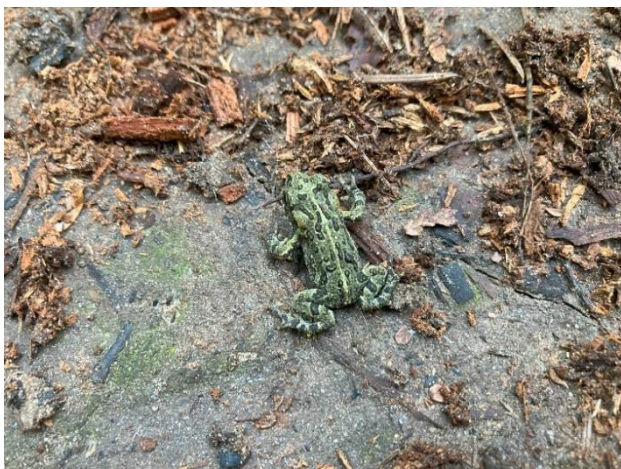
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"Hope is a thing with feathers."
Emily Dickenson

Little Mountain Western Toad Observations

by Colin Spence



At long last, I have finally prepared a contribution for our club's newsletter! I originally planned and had partially written a story about bees, but then I encountered something at Little Mountain that seemed more important and timelier to report on. So, here goes – this is my update on recent observations of Western Toads in Little Mountain Park.

First, a bit of background. The Western Toad occurs throughout most of BC, as well as in western Alberta, the southeast Yukon and southwestern Northwest Territories. For those who may not be aware, the species is listed as being of "Special Concern" by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada.

Western Toads require three different habitats: shallow water during the spring breeding season, a variety of terrestrial habitats in the summer, and dens for winter hibernation. Adults migrate to aquatic breeding sites in the early spring to mate and lay eggs, and within 3-12 days the eggs hatch and become tadpoles. With the passing of another 6-8 weeks, the tadpoles develop into dime-sized toadlets adapted to terrestrial habitats. These tiny youngsters begin an overland migration which typically occurs between the end of July and end of August, lasting up to 4 weeks. During this period, predation and human activities take their toll. Imagine the mortality from hiker's boots and dogs on the trails at Little Mountain!

Veteran members of our club have reported seeing toadlets crossing the trails in Little Mountain Park, and sometimes in great numbers. Margo Hartling, who has lived just east of the "Hartling Trail" for decades, reported that she observed toadlets in the thousands on their property the year they built their house, which I believe was sometime in the 1980s. Interestingly, Margo felt the numbers corresponded to a year of high spring/summer rainfall, recalling that "it never stopped raining the summer we built our house!". Her observation set off mental alarm bells when I thought about the drought currently facing our region.



Juvenile Western Toads are tiny and well camouflaged but their movements on an open trail make them relatively easy to spot.

On July 20 this year, I heard reports toadlets being observed in Little Mountain Park in the Hartling Trail area. The next morning, Julia and I walked the entire outer perimeter of the trail network and counted 6 toadlets on or beside the trail, all located between the Pond View-Hartling intersection, and the Outer Loop-Birch intersection (see trail map). With high temperatures around 30° C that day, conditions were probably very challenging for the toadlets. Rain and cooler temperatures that night provided some relief, and when we repeated the same walk on July 22, we observed 21 toadlets in the same area. Other trail users we spoke to reported seeing "more" and even "hundreds" of toadlets a few days earlier, but we only saw a handful more toadlets in subsequent walks over the next couple of weeks, so the peak migration appeared to have passed.

My experience hearing about and seeing this toadlet migration led me to consider starting an annual survey that could easily be incorporated into my regular walks on the Little Mountain trails. If we laid out sampling locations and a schedule, and repeated this annually, we could begin to develop an understanding of the behaviour and population status of toads in the park. To this end, I constructed a map illustrating a couple of transects we could cover (see attached trail map). Toadlets tend to be most active from 8 to 11 a.m. and 5 to 7 p.m. during the migration period, so walks would be best scheduled to adhere to that timing. I could personally manage at least 3 counts per week and have made a note in my calendar to start looking around July 15 in 2025. If others are interested, we could coordinate. There would also be value in better documenting historic observations of club members, Margo Hartling and other trail users at some point.

An additional benefit of this activity would be the opportunity to speak with other trail users while conducting the count. The public needs to be made “toad aware”, and encouraged to avoid stepping on them, prevent their dogs from attacking them, and generally avoid disturbing the tiny creatures. With so many people now using this trail network, foot traffic-related mortality could be substantial.

This map shows a portion of the Little Mountain Trail network and

includes highlighted areas of the trail where toadlet counts could be undertaken.



I also want to make everyone aware of another immediate concern related to the presence of many woody debris piles resulting from fire prevention work undertaken this past spring (see attached photo). Based on what I have read about toad hibernacula, I think it is possible these piles might attract such activity. The piles will probably be burned this winter, so any toads or other wildlife using those sites are at risk. This is something to consider and perhaps needs some discussion by our club to decide if it is worth bringing to the attention of the city.

Wildfire fuel management in Little Mountain Park has created numerous burn piles that might be used as hibernacula by Western Toads.



If toadlet counting sounds appealing to you, or you have any thoughts on a study design, please let me know. I think this would be an enjoyable and relatively easy project to implement, so let's give it a try and see what we can learn!