

# SHUSWAP NATURALIST CLUB

NEWSLETTER  
February 2017  
Volume 17, number 1

To know Nature  
and keep it worth knowing

## Ruffed Grouse

One of the stars of the Christmas Bird Count



*photo by Roger Beardmore*

### Regular Club Meetings

1<sup>st</sup> Tuesday of month

- September: 11 AM - Sunnybrae Park
- October to May: 7 PM  
Library, Sullivan Campus of  
Salmon Arm Secondary School
- June: 4 PM – meeting & potluck  
Peter Jannink Nature Park

### Club website:

[www.shuswapnaturalists.org](http://www.shuswapnaturalists.org)

### Mailing address:

1740 16<sup>th</sup> St. NE  
Salmon Arm, BC V1E 3Z7

**Member of BC Nature - the Federation of BC Naturalists**

## **Club Executive**

**Co-Presidents:** Ed McDonald  
Janet Pattinson

**Vice President:**

**Secretary:** Michelle Weisenger

**Treasurer:** Ted Hillary

**Directors:** Janet Aitken

Isobel Anderson

Clive Bryson

Pat Hutchins

Dorothy Parks

Gillian Richardson

## **Committees**

**Programs:**

**FBCN Director:** Janet Pattinson

**Website & E-mail:** Dorothy Parks

**Membership:** Ted Hillary

**BC Nature e-news reporter:**

Gillian Richardson

**Newsletter:** Ed and Marlene McDonald

**Historian:** Gillian Richardson

**Good News Reports:** Hanne MacKay

**Coffee Conveners:**

June and Clive Bryson

Pat Turner, Isobel Anderson

**Award /Bursary:**

Dorothy Parks, Janet Pattinson

**SABNES Rep:**

**Grebe Count:** Di Wittner

**Enderby/Armstrong Bird Count:**

Geoff Styles

**Salmon Arm Christmas Bird Count:**

Ted Hillary

**Mara Meadows Warden:**

Jeremy Ayotte

**Weedpull Project:** Ed McDonald

**Songbird Committee:**

Janet Aitken, Isobel Anderson,

Gillian Richardson, Clare Meunier,

Loretta Prosser

**Friends of Gardom Lake rep:**

Anne Caughlin

**District Environment Committee:**

Janet Pattinson

**Naturalist Trail:** Greg Wiebe

**McGuire Lake Turtle Count:** Pat Turner

**Outings Committee:**

Pat Danforth, Marie Fortin,

Hanne MacKay, Dawn McDonald

**Young Naturalists:**

Geoff and Emily Styles

**"The achievements of a club are the results of the combined effort of each individual."**

Vince Lombardi

Sharon Lawless, in her mini-presentation at the December meeting, talked about how she valued the club and what a good club it is.

One of the things that makes this a good club is how we are blessed with members who are willing to step forward and take on the jobs to help with the smooth operation of its various activities. This work is much appreciated, and we thank all who contribute.

Two of our dedicated members are vacating their positions at this time.

Sharon Lawless has been responsible for providing our meetings with programs for the past three years. And what a great job she has done. Not only has she produced a great slate of presenters, she is remarkable in how she has taken care of the many details that this job has entailed. Thank-you Sharon.

The other member we wish to thank is Barb Hillary for her role in posting the notices of our monthly meetings in the local papers. Barb has carried out this task for over ten years and we thank her for all the effort she has put towards notifying members and the public.

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An American Dipper,  
shivering in the cold on bird count day.



*photo by Roger Beardmore*

# Christmas Bird Counts of 2016

This year Shuswap Naturalist Club members participated in three bird counts:

## North Shuswap Count

This count was held on December 20. The area covered is Celista to Squilax and then to White Lake. There were 2,455 birds counted and 62 species recorded. Three species of interest were a Western Grebe, a Turkey Vulture and a Gray-crowned Rosy Finch. Interestingly, there were 22 of these finches counted in 2015, at the very same location. The highest count for all species was 242 Bohemian Waxwings.

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## Salmon Arm Count

Report by Ted Hillary:

The Salmon Arm annual Christmas Bird Count was held on Sunday December 18. There were 24 participants in 6 parties starting at 7:30 A.M. and finishing by 3:30. The wind from the northwest was light around the lake, but up to 10 kilometers an hour higher up. There was a skiff of snow in the morning, especially at the higher elevations, but not enough to harm visibility.

The number of species seen was 70, which is lower than usual. The cold spell in the previous week had many species, such as the gulls, head south. The total number of birds seen was 7069, also a bit lower than usual. In addition, there were 4 more species seen during count week, bringing our totals up to 74.

There were a couple of notable sightings. A Yellow-billed Loon was seen at Canoe near the boat launch, feeding and swimming with a Western Grebe. This is the first reported Yellow-billed Loon since the early '90's. During count week a pair of Canvasbacks were seen at the wharf in Canoe. This is the first ever report of this species on our Christmas bird counts.

Canada Geese were the most commonly seen bird during the count with 1104 individuals. This was followed by European Starlings with 667

and Mallards with 536. There were several species with all-time record highs for our count: 20 Ring-necked Ducks, 77 Bald Eagles, 288 Eurasian Collared-Doves, and 355 Red-winged Blackbirds. Other species with good counts were 6 Northern Shrikes and 6 American Dippers, not record highs but still notable.

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## Armstrong-Enderby Count

Report by Geoff Styles:

The third Armstrong-Enderby CBC was held on Monday, January 2nd. With a low of -22 and high of -8, it was a challenging day for both bird and counter, though the blue skies and sunshine left everyone in the latter group smiling by day's end. Hoar frost covered every branch and plant, leaving it all looking like it was encrusted in white diamonds. Open water was a challenge to find, with the most productive spot being the sewage treatment ponds in Armstrong, which held Mallard, Common and Barrow's Goldeneye, Green-winged Teal, Lesser Scaup, Bufflehead and Ring-necked Duck!

The 56 species were the lowest total of the three years. The day did produce some highlights for the counters, however, as well as a number of stunning photos. Many thanks to the group of 12 hardy counters: Ted and Barbara, Helga, Joyce, Gillian, Pat D, Hanne, Janet A, Don Cecile, Roger and Nan.

One new species for the count circle - Ring-necked Duck, was found, and a new race-integrade Northern Flicker. Highlights include American Wigeon, Brown Creeper, Townsend's Solitaire, White-crowned and White-throated Sparrow, Evening Grosbeak and 3 Cassin's Finch in two different locations.

We're always looking for help on this route as there are long distances to cover. If you would like to be put on the list for next year, please email Geoff at [gem\\_styles@yahoo.ca](mailto:gem_styles@yahoo.ca).

## Shuswap Naturalist Club Award



**Jennifer Petersen,**  
this year's scholarship/award winner.

Jennifer Petersen is in her fourth year of Natural Resource Science at Thompson Rivers University and will be graduating this year. She was the one to be chosen to receive our award last year, making this the second year that we have been able to contribute to her education.

### A note from Jennifer:

Thank-you for choosing me as the receiver of this wonderful award. Your generous donation will greatly help me develop my career in the natural resource sciences. I am most passionate about wildlife management and conservation. I plan to train and become a wildlife biologist and hope to make a difference in wildlife management by developing more sustainable resource practices.

I have worked with rattlesnakes, burrowing owls, and small mammals in British Columbia in the past, and I am very thankful for this award as it will help fund my future endeavors in wildlife studies.

## Club Outings

"At the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time."  
T.S. Eliot

## Outing Committee Report

From Dawn McDonald:

As the wind bullies snow swirls around the house and carefree walks through the fields are arrested by the deep snow, our soul can be fed by images of the golden spots we have visited on our Shuswap Naturalist outings. I recall the power of the flowers on Neskonlith meadows, a flock of heron lifting from the trees at the Vernon bird sanctuary, a ribbon garter snake at Marie's, Mike pushing Pam on a swing surrounded by autumn gold at the Smith's retreat and Joyce's gasp to see a flock of rare birds rising on the Columbia wetlands.

Our outings committee will soon be planning six spring outings and four for fall. We invite your input into what works for you and any problems you are having regarding the outings. Anyone who would like to lead a trip or has a new idea, or an old favourite, for us to consider please pass your ideas along via Ed's email. Hopefully our walks will be a highlight in your summer and the embers that fuel your golden memories in winter.

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### Membership:

Ted Hillary reminds us that it is again time for us to pay our dues and he is happy to receive our money.

Membership fees cover a membership in BC Nature, the BC Nature magazine plus our club's liability insurance. We keep about \$5 for a single and \$10 for a family membership to help with club expenses.

Dues are: Single - \$25 Family - \$30

## The Weed Pull Project

The program to eliminate woody nightshade from the Salmon Arm marsh has met with success in the area from the entrance to the nature reserve to the beaver dam. The boardwalk area is clear.

The area from the beaver dam to Christmas Island will require two or three more weed pulls in order to eliminate this invasive species. There may be help from high school students this spring.

October's effort yielded 50 bags, bringing our total to 150 bags for the three events. A big thank-you goes to all the hard-working volunteers who have participated in this project.

Working with the Columbia Shuswap Invasive Species Society has been a very positive experience. This organization has guided the program in a very professional manner.

There were two other species that drew our attention.

Touch-me-not (*Impatiens aurella*) has suddenly sprung up in large patches. and it was thought to be impacting the ecology of the marsh. We were told that at this point there is little cause for alarm. The plant's flower attracts bees and hummingbirds. Another name for the plant is jewel weed – in spring look for the moisture collecting on the leaves, looking like diamonds.



Touch-me-not

Another species growing on the trail just north of the island was first feared to be purple loosestrife, but CSISS staff came out and identified the plant as marsh nettle, a member of the mint family. This plant also attracts many bees and appears to be favoured by butterflies.



marsh nettle

Furthermore, the biodiversity of the marsh that will be enhanced by the work of biologist Gerry Leering this spring, will be a huge step in ensuring the future health of the nature reserve.

### The work party this fall.



photo by Janet Aitken

Congratulations to everyone who has and is putting an effort into this worthwhile project.

# Mara Meadows Ecological Reserve Report

## January 2017

Report by Jeremy Ayotte

The highlight of the year was walking through Mara Meadows Ecological Reserve with fellow Shuswap Naturalists. Roger Beardmore documented one of the trips with beautiful photos of some of the meadow's prolific orchids: yellow and white ladyslippers, and bog orchids.

### White Lady Slipper



*photo by Roger Beardmore*

We also caught a fleeting view of the pair of Sandhill cranes as they drifted back through the tall dry sedges and rushes at the far end of the fen.

After discovering a rare invasive hawkweed growing in the fen meadow last year with botanist Curtis Bjork, we instituted a change of footwear rule. Hiking into Mara Meadows first

requires a ten-minute walk along old skid trails and logging roads. Along the way, we can pick up unwanted hitchhiking seeds of invasive plants, so we switch footwear hoping to avoid being the vector for these plants looking for ways to access and colonize the sensitive wetland.

This past summer BC Parks staff also sprayed the forest trail from the road to the wetland edge to kill hawkweed that had colonized the disturbed road bed, a more drastic measure.

We will continue to monitor the presence of invasive hawkweeds within the fen. Using a different kind of "round-up", the patches of oxeye daisy that John Coffey annually pulled out by the roots and carried out in plastic bags, continue to be difficult to find.

The wet and mild temperatures this past fall created the perfect kind of place for Columbia Spotted Frogs, which Roger captured in a photo. These frogs seemed prolific this year judging by the number of splashes from frightened frogs as we walked through the fen edge.

### Spotted Frog



*photo by Roger Beardmore*

All in all, the Mara Meadows continues to thrive as a quiet catch basin for the limestone enriched water trickling down Violet Creek, creating that unique mix of water chemistry that suits BC orchids so well.

# Save Our Songbirds

## The Messenger

reaches an appreciative audience

Gillian Richardson writes:

In November, the Shuswap Naturalist Club teamed up with SABNES to bring the award-winning Eco-Documentary film, *The Messenger*, to the Salmar Classic theatre. Sizable audiences turned out at the two showings, and judging by the follow-up discussion led by Geoff Styles, it was clear residents are concerned about our vital connection to songbirds and their decline due to the impact of human activity.

As a way to keep the topic of helping songbird populations front of mind, a Club committee was formed to plan information events at intervals through the coming year using tips described in an article by John Neville, published in BC Nature (Summer 2016). These ideas included enjoying the hobby of bird identification, creating a bird friendly garden through planting in summer and feeders in winter, finding ways to prevent bird/window collisions, keeping cats indoors, and buying shade-grown coffee available in local stores.

The committee chose to focus first on bird feeders with an information display appropriate for the season in Piccadilly Mall in mid-December. Mall patrons stopped by the table to take in valuable tips for helping songbirds get through the winter by providing seed, suet and water. The exhibit included feeders, along with books available from the local bookstore and identification posters. Bookmarks were handed out with both clubs' websites, encouraging people to seek more information. There was considerable interest over the three days, with a couple of visitors inspired to shop right away for a bird feeder for their garden. Willing volunteers from the Club helped staff the table. Thank You!

In the near future, the committee will choose another focus and venue. Watch for details! Let the committee know if you have ideas to share.

## Red-winged Blackbird



photo by Jim Hoskins

Though one of the most abundant songbirds on the continent, the Red-winged Blackbird's population has declined over 30% between 1966 - 2014.

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### BC Nature Conference and AGM

Lillooet, BC May 4-6, 2017

#### "Canyon to Alpine"

Hosted by the Lillooet Naturalist Society

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This promises to be a very interesting conference. Check you BC Nature magazine for more information.

Mike and Pam Saul will be attending and have agreed to be our club's representatives at these meetings. We look forward to their report.

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## Coming Presentations

As arranged by Janet Pattinson:

March 7 - Jeremy Ayotte – Biologist  
Wild sheep capture and collaring project

April 4 - Michelle Walsh - Tribal Fisheries  
Biologist Secwepemc Fisheries Commission -  
Fish habitat research in the Deadman River

This is the project to which we lent our support last year.

May 2 - Di Wittner – Wildlife Biologist

