

SHUSWAP NATURALIST CLUB

NEWSLETTER

September 2016

Volume 16, number 2

To know Nature
and keep it worth knowing

Western Grebe -

I look right, I look left and I see the same thing.



photo by Pat Hutchins

Regular Club Meetings

1st 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

Mailing address:

1740 16th St. NE
Salmon Arm, BC V1E 3Z7

Member of BC Nature - the Federation of BC Naturalists

Club Executive

President: Ed McDonald

Vice President: vacant

Secretary: Michelle Weisenger

Treasurer: Ted Hillary

Directors: Janet Aitken

Isobel Anderson

Clive Bryson

Pat Hutchins

Dorothy Parks

Janet Pattinson

Gillian Richardson

Committees

Programs: Sharon Lawless

FBCN Director: Janet Pattinson

Website & E-mail: Dorothy Parks

Membership: Ted Hillary

Publicity: Barbara Hillary

BC Nature e-news reporter:

Gillain Richardson

Newsletter:

Ed and Marlene McDonald

Historian: Gillian Richardson

Good News Reports: Hanne MacKay

Coffee Conveners: Pat Turner,

Isobel Anderson, Marlene McD.

Award /Bursary:

Dorothy Parks, Janet Pattinson

SABNES Rep: vacant

Grebe Count: Di Wittner

Enderby/Armstrong Bird Count:

Geoff Styles

Salmon Arm Christmas Bird Count:

Ted Hillary

Mara Meadows Warden:

Jeremy Ayotte

Friends of Gardom Lake rep:

Anne Caughlin

District Environment Committee:

Janet Pattinson

Nature Park: Jim Hoskins

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 Weed Pull Project

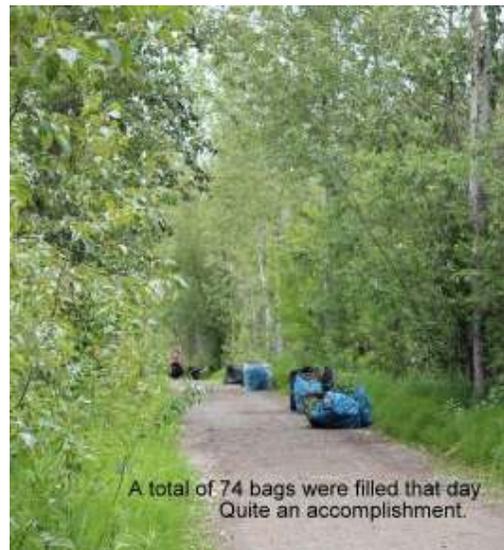
On May 25 club members along with volunteers from the community, twenty-two in all, set out to remove the woody nightshade from along the trail of the Salmon Arm Nature Reserve.



photos by Janet Aitken

Some pulled the weeds while others remained on the path, stuffing the garbage bags, which were then taken to the landfill. It was hard work, but also a lot of fun and very rewarding. See Pat Mearns and Sid Visser above.

Having now completed two successful weed pulls, we can see positive results in the reduction of woody nightshade. Another weed pull is being planned for this fall. Come help if you can. There is a great deal of satisfaction in doing this, in working to preserve the quality of the marsh.



Great Canadian Birdathon

Report by Hanne MacKay:

The weather was perfect on Sunday May 15 for the annual Baillie Birdathon.

Geoff Styles, Pat Danforth, Janet Aitken and Hanne MacKay enjoyed the light overcast sky at 6:30am on Black Road by spotting Nashville Warblers, Lazuli Buntings and a Great Grey Owl to start the day!

They continued on to Larch Lake to see Barrow's Goldeneye and Bald Eagles sharing the little lake. In the surrounding forest were Ruby and Orange-crowned Kinglets and a delightful Pacific (or Western) Wren serenading close by.

Making their way down to the Grindrod area, a Kestral, many Violet-green Swallows, Wilson's Snipe and a Pied-billed Grebe were seen.

In Enderby, Pat Danforth noted several plants that were of interest such as the Palmate Coltsfoot, Poison Ivy, Black Twinberry and Cow Parsnip. Yellow Warblers, a pair of Wood Ducks, Bullock's Oriole, Western Peewee, Hammond's Flycatcher, many Say's Phoebes, Western and Eastern Kingbirds and a Lincoln's Sparrow were also seen. A Shrike was heard overhead.

Yellow-headed Blackbirds, a muskrat, about 20 Western Grebes and a Red-headed duck brought the day to a close. Due to other commitments they had to stop at 1:00 pm. They were hoping to see bluebirds and meadowlarks but that was not to be.

When the tally was done, it was realized that 77 species for half a day of birding was very rewarding indeed!

* * * * *

Much appreciated

A big thank-you to Greg Wiebe who has on his own managed to eliminate most of the woody nightshade on the Nature Trail in front of the Prestige Inn. Well done!

Turtle Talk

From Pat Turner:

The McGuire Lake turtles appear to be holding their own. Since starting patrols round the lake in July 2014 the numbers have increased. Right now, in July and August the counts are down, and it was the same last year. Perhaps most of the turtles decamp to the big lake where there's deeper, cooler water, more food and better social opportunities. It doesn't help counting that the reeds are tall and thick round most of the lake, and the bushes are in full leaf.

At the moment, on a lake patrol, one might see 5 turtles or less. The ducks have the logs mostly to themselves and possibly there are places in the reeds where turtles can bask peacefully undisturbed by ducks and unseen by humans.

The record count for 2014 was 16 turtles on September 11th. Last year the best sighting was 23 on April 21st. This year the numbers have increased – 29 on March 21st, 33 on April 10th and on April 21st my daughter, who works very near the lake, counted 50 while walking round the lake in her lunch hour. (She always beats my totals!)

Both last and this year saw a drop in numbers in June and July-August, in spite of different weather conditions. It will be interesting to see if the numbers rebound later in August-September as they did in 2014 and 2015.

There were very few ducks around the lake this spring and once again, no drakes, but in the last two months several ducks have raised broods so there are plenty of young mallards strutting around the lake in their spiffy new adult plumage. The waterlilies are beautiful at the moment, there are nice new washrooms at the east end of the lake and it is a very pleasant place to go for a walk.



BC Nature AGM - 2016

Comox Valley

Report by Janet Pattenson:

Comox Valley Nature Club hosted another excellent conference and AGM weekend in Courtenay with a broad range of field trips in the area including pre- and post-conference offerings. They provided meals by a local caterer who focused on locally produced ingredients. This included breakfasts that were a big hit. Their speakers were interesting and entertaining as well.

On Thursday evening they hosted the local poet who recited several of his writings. That was followed by an introduction to a "film in the making" called Toad People which we should be able to access in the coming year. This is about people across the province who are taking action to protect species at risk.

Dr Richard Hebda of the Royal BC Museum in Victoria provided data on climate change - rather scary - and speculated on the impacts of climate change on Vancouver Island. His forecast: dry climate and grassland rather than forest.

Krista Kaptein gave a short presentation on her work for IBA's in BC. All this plus a welcome by the mayor of Cumberland was fitted into Thursday evening!

Friday morning speakers were paired so we had to make a choice - always difficult. I decided on "Tree Diseases in Gardens and Parks" by Dr. Duncan Morrison. He squeezed a lot of detail into his short amount of time.

Then I chose "Tsolum River Restoration" by Jack Minard. This was about a project on one of the rivers in the Comox Valley that had once been a major salmon stream but due to human interventions, such as channelling and agriculture, had been reduced to no salmon at all. After the efforts of the restoration group, salmon have returned. It wasn't easy.

I then heard about "Wetland Conservation" by Dan Buffet who works for Ducks Unlimited. This was about their accomplishments on Vancouver Island.

Friday afternoon brought the much anticipated field trips and a chance to get out in the fresh air and sunshine. The whole weekend turned out to be warm and sunny. I went to a local woodlot with a forester as leader. We noted the species of trees and other plants in that part of the island and heard details of the woodlot owner's planned harvesting.

Friday evening brought the celebratory dinner for the Comox Valley Nature Club's Fiftieth Anniversary plus two speakers. Helen Robinson told about her challenges in producing a new Valley Plant List. Then Briony Penn talked about her research and writing of a biography of Ian McTaggart-Cowan.

Saturday morning we had the BC Nature AGM which went very smoothly. Then Steven Price, President of Bird Studies Canada, told us about the soon to be released report on birds of Canada - which was released within a few days of the AGM.

Saturday afternoon brought more field trips. I went with a group interested in the garry oaks that are native to the Island, but are greatly reduced due to urban development. The topic came up again after the banquet when the keynote speaker for Saturday evening talked about "Friends and Enemies of the Garry Oak".

The Saturday evening banquet was a big success and the evening ended up with a "raucous auction". Some of the items from the silent auction were brought out and live bidding began.

Overall, I would say this conference was another of the many opportunities for naturalists to engage in "lifelong learning" through attendance at BC Nature general meetings. The next opportunity is in Prince George, September 22 to 24, 2016. The 2017 AGM will be in Lillooet May 4 - 7.

Counting Western Grebes

Report by Di Wittner:

Who wouldn't want the delightful task of spending four or five hours watching Salmon Arm's magnificent Western Grebes? Counting them is another matter altogether, still delightful but a lot more challenging than observing behaviour. First, there's the strategic calculation of choosing the best surveillance posts. Then there's the simple fact that grebes, like most wild creatures, don't freeze in an obedient tableau while I add up their numbers!

I counted the grebes once a month for three months, keeping times and viewing stations roughly the same as a way of maintaining some semblance of consistency. With no notion of what their numbers have been historically, I went into the count without bias, repeating the tally three or four times at each station in order to have some confidence in the final record. The tables below are simplified and show each month's count.

Early nesting in June meant I wasn't counting only adults. The good thing about this count was adults were not exhibiting a lot of movement so they were easy to see. So were the young. The bad thing was there were sure to be adults concealed on nests where I wouldn't see them at all. In the time elapsed from start to finish, there could easily have been some overlap as well; as a result, a few adults may have been counted more than once. However, the overall confidence level in this count is fairly high with a total of 235. I made no attempt to differentiate Clark's grebes from Western grebes in this or any other month as some of them were too far away to allow positive identification.

Viewing Location	Adults	Young
Sandy Point	42	1
Peter Jannink Park	113	6
Wharf	15	5
Beaver pond platform	24	6
North foreshore trail	20	0
Tappen Bay/Sunnybrae Park	3	0
Totals	217	18

Table 1: Grebe count, June 16, 2016

In July, things had changed a lot! Adults were in third gear, diving, hunting, and guarding young. Viewing conditions were also chaotic with heavy glare on the water, a lot of boat activity, windy conditions that caused ripples and waves, and many birds very far offshore. I got smart this time and rigged a sling for my scope so I could bike the foreshore trail, getting to viewpoints quicker and reducing the potential for counting very mobile birds twice but I was cross-eyed by day's end! My confidence in the adult count for July was not great though the juveniles were easy to count now being relatively inactive. The total now 315.

Count Location	Adults	Juveniles
Sandy Point (9:05 am)	13	1
Peter Jannink Park	69	53 (+ 1 dead)
Pier north/west	25	16
Pier east	12	8
Beaver pond platform	23	13
Christmas Island	4	4
Boardwalk	28	19
Raven/end of trail	14	4
Tappen B/Sunnybrae Pk	6	0
Sunnybrae/Canoe (2:25)	3	0
Totals	197	118 (+1 mortality)

Table 2: Grebe count, July 14, 2016

August presented a different picture again. There were some late bloomers – five fuzzy gray young - but for the most part, adults and juveniles were of similar size and grouped together in the count. Viewing conditions were much better than in July with a notable increase in dispersal to deeper water. I couldn't remember the previous months' totals and was quite surprised at the similar totals. Was that a good thing? Or was my data fudged? That's the kind of question a good scientist would ask!

Count Location	Adults	Juveniles
Sandy Point (8:25 am)	3	
Peter Jannink Park	192	
Wharf	52	5
Beaver pond platform	2	
Foreshore north	47	
Tappen Bay	5	
Sunnybrae Park	21	
Canoe (12:35 pm)	0	
Total	322	5

Table 2: Grebe count, August 13, 2016

Academic Award

Our 2016 Academic Award to a student in environmental studies at Thompson Rivers University will be given in honour of Harry Higgins. Harry was an original member of the Shuswap Naturalist Club, and the Higgins family has continued to be a paid member for the past 45 years.

Hanne MacKay writes:

Harry Ormsby Higgins had a lifelong, deep fascination with nature, from the time he was a boy and lived in Venezuela, New Guinea, California and Borneo. He could always be found in the 'bush' exploring the insects, birds and reptiles. His schooling took place in Australia and Cambridge University, England.

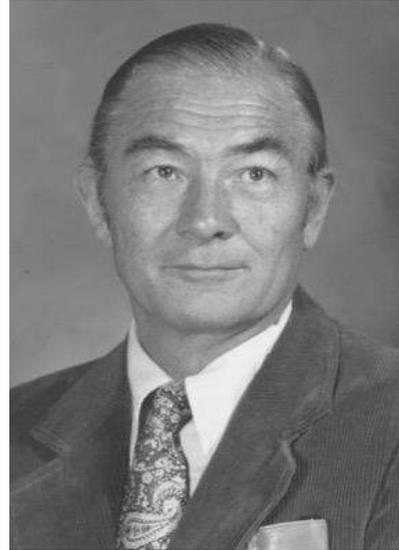
Harry passed away in Salmon Arm on June 7th, 2016.

Harry and his wife, Lois moved to this area in 1969 and looked for a Naturalist Club to help them learn about the North Okanagan. They were introduced to the Vernon Naturalists by Jim and Mary Mack and joined them for about a year.

During that time, Harry helped two University of Victoria students mark about 1500 rattlesnakes in the Coldstream Ranch area for a research project. The Higgins then decided to establish a group in Salmon Arm.

They contacted Mary Lou Tapson-Jones and her brother Bob Wood to start the Shuswap Naturalist Club. There was immediate interest, as the Henderson, Brighthouse and Filiatrault families enjoyed many outings together.

As Salmon Arm grew, the Shuswap Naturalists Club and Harry Higgins played an important role in the preservation of natural areas in our community. The foreshore was being developed and Harry, along with Tom Brighthouse, understood what an ecologically valuable resource these wetlands were.



Harry was instrumental in getting Nature Trust involved in protecting the section of the foreshore that Salmon Arm Nature Enhancement Society (SABNES) now provides stewardship for.

Harry also joined the Salmon River Round Table to help in the restoration of the river habitat. He went from house to house along the river all the way to the headwaters in Falkland, asking and helping homeowners to fence the riverbanks to keep domestic animals from degrading the river quality. He, along with Frank Kime, saw to the placing of nest boxes all along the river's riparian area.

He then approached the Douglas Lake Cattle Company to help them understand that the marsh above the Salmon River that had been reclaimed for ranch land was affecting the river flow for the Salmon River fish. Harry's calm and politely dignified manner won him much cooperation over the years in the many endeavours that he undertook.

Harry and Lois have funded a beautiful sign on the foreshore explaining the reptile and amphibian life found in this area.

Harry's thoughtful contributions are very much appreciated and have made a lasting difference to our natural community.

The Optimistic Environmentalist: Progressing Towards a Greener Future

by Boyd, David R.
Toronto: ECW Press, 2015

Book Review by Gillian Richardson:

Are you a glass-half full, or glass-half empty person? Does the constant media bombardment of bad news depress you? It can be especially hard to stay optimistic about the future of the environment when feelings of hopelessness become overwhelming. Here's a book with the power to dampen that pessimism. The author is a Pender Island-based environmental lawyer and educator who has embraced a sustainable attitude and lifestyle to write about *"humanity's past environmental successes, current trends and future probabilities,"* his goal to encourage us to share his optimism.

This book lays out a wealth of examples from recovery by endangered species, protection of habitat, restoration of the ozone layer, proliferation of renewable energy and reduction in air pollution. While acknowledging the challenges ahead, he points out how far we've come historically, for instance, in eliminating toxic chemicals in our environment. In the day to day assault of bad news, we tend to lose perspective about the degree of this progress.

In addition to success stories for many species of animals, you'll read descriptions of alternate energy systems showing exponential growth around the world due largely to the decline in cost. There's a discussion of the "circular economy" and how far it has moved our attitudes away from the "throw away" model and toward reusing, reducing and recycling. A whole section is devoted to showing great strides with respect to cleaner air, water and the reduction of toxic chemical use. Several more chapters focus on global cities where buildings and transport are putting new technologies to work to become green. How

about electric ferries? This technology is now in place in Scandinavia. Why not in BC?

You may be familiar with many of Boyd's examples, but taken altogether, the wealth of positive change that has already occurred, both large and small, may surprise you. His details offer compelling evidence of this, and more benefits should come through enlightened environmental policies. A comprehensive bibliography attests to the author's research. As he suggests, "The belief that something positive is possible is an essential step towards making it happen." Whether you agree or not, this book will give you a refreshing dose of optimism.

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Look what we had stroll by



A note from Dorothy Parks:

One day in early August we were astounded to see a badger running by our place at Heronview. We felt very lucky when we reported it to the Thompson-Okanagan badger hotline. We were informed that they are secretive and nocturnal, and that the BC population is less than 350.

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Coming Presentations

As arranged by Sharon Lawless

Oct. 4 - Mandy Kellner - Bat Presentation

Nov. 1 - Pat Hutchins -

Photos of Birds in Flight

Dec. 6 - Members' Presentations - TBA

Deadman River Project

Putting our money to good use.

Michelle Walsh, Tribal Fisheries Biologist Secwepemc Fisheries Commission, was referred to our club by Dr. Alan Burger of BC Nature to request some financial support towards the salmon habitat research in the Deadman River, a key salmon tributary of the Thompson watershed. This project is being supervised by Dr. Brian Heise at TRU (Natural Resource Sciences).

Michelle wrote, "I have been successful in securing some funds from five fisheries groups, however, I am still short on funds." She listed the specifics for which the money was needed, and as a club, we decided to send her \$500 to help with this project.

Michelle wrote back:

Dear Shuswap Naturalist Club,
Your donation is so very much appreciated! I would love to share my results and progress with you. Field season should wrap up in October and the winter would be best. I can touch base closer to the end of field season. Thank-you so much, this is very generous of your group.

Michelle

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The weed pull continues -

Wednesday, October 5

At their end of summer meeting, the club directors discussed and set the date for the next weed pull. Progress is being made, but there is still much to be done. The Columbia Shuswap Invasive Species Society (CSISS) is again lending its support. Come help if you can.

Meet at Interpretive Centre at 8:45.

Wear old clothes and boots or old shoes.

Bring gloves.

Some hand clippers would be useful.

We will again need a few pick-up trucks. Let us know if you can help with this.

Fall Club Outings

Thurs. Sept. 15 – Reinecker Creek

Some hilly walking, beautiful scenery, walking up through ponderosa pine forest, looking for lichen, mosses and songbirds.

Bring snack or lunch.

9:00–Piccadilly Mall Parking Lot – SE Corner

9:30–Margaret Falls parking lot

Ed McDonald / Dawn and Pat

Thurs. Sept. 29 - Brian and Eva Smith retreat and home - trails and ponds.

Located off Mallory Road at 964 Alexander.

9:00 - Arena Parking Lot / Hanne MacKay

Thurs. Oct. 13 – BX Trail and/or Bishop Wild Bird Sanctuary in Vernon – details will be sent out when the outing plan is finalized.

9:00 - Arena Parking beside Junglemania

10:00 - Swan Lake Garden Centre Parking Lot

Thurs. Oct. 20 - Salmon Arm Bay Foreshore

An opportunity to enjoy our local shorebirds.

Those interested will meet for a "wind up" lunch at the Prestige Inn afterwards.

9:00 - SABNES Parking Lot / Ed McDonald



This marmot spent much of its time this summer monitoring the foreshore.

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This ten-line june beetle arrived on our doorstep, late, on July 20th.