

# SHUSWAP NATURALIST CLUB

NEWSLETTER  
September 2019  
Volume 19, number 2

To know Nature  
and keep it worth knowing

Red-winged Blackbird perched on the Cattails



*photo by Jim Hoskins*

## 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)

## Email address:

[info@shuswapnaturalists.org](mailto:info@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 and Directors

**President:** Ed McDonald

**Vice-President:** Gillian Richardson

**Treasurer:** Ted Hillary

**Secretary:** Michelle Weisinger

Janet Aitken

Pat Hutchins

Sharon Lawless

Dorothy Parks

Janet Pattinson

Sarah Weaver

## Club Committees

**Programs:** Janet Pattinson

**Membership:** Ted Hillary

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

**Publicity:** Loretta Prosser

**BC Nature Director:** Di Wittner

**BC Nature e-news reporter:**

Gillian Richardson

**Newsletter:**

Ed and Marlene McDonald

**Historian:** Gillian Richardson

**Coffee Conveners:**

June and Clive Bryson

Pat Turner, Isobel Anderson

**Award /Bursary:**

Dorothy Parks, Janet Pattinson

**SABNES:** Janet Aitken (Pres.)

**Grebe Count:** Di Wittner

**Bird House Project:**

Roger Beardmore, Di Wittner

**Enderby/Armstrong Bird Count:**

Geoff Styles

**Salmon Arm Christmas Bird Count:**

Ted Hillary

**Mara Meadows Warden:**

Jeremy Ayotte

**Songbird Committee:**

Janet Aitken, Isobel Anderson,  
Roger Beardmore, Pat Danforth,  
Gillian Richardson, Clare Meunier,  
Loretta Prosser, Pat Turner

**Weedpull Project:** Ed McDonald

**Friends of Gardom Lake rep:**

Sarah Weaver

**District Environment Committee:**

Janet Pattinson

**Naturalist Trail:** Greg Wiebe

**McGuire Lake Turtle Count:** Pat Turner

**Outings Committee:**

Pat Danforth, Kyle Fitzpatrick,  
Marie Fortin, Hanne MacKay,  
Dawn McDonald

**Young Naturalists:** Molly Cooperman

**Wildlife Rescue:**

Di Wittner, Wally Kirkpatrick,  
Carla Kirkpatrick, Pat Hutchins,  
Roger Beardmore, Ed McDonald

**Larch Hills Interpretive Trail:**

Pat Danforth, Dawn McDonald  
Maureen Sigston

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## Remembering Jim:

While it was Jim Hoskins' love of the outdoors and keen interest in nature and nature photography that made him a natural fit for the Club when he joined in 2005, he also stood out for his willingness to volunteer.

This was especially apparent during our weed pull project. When the rest of us arrived ready to begin, we found Jim already there, usually with the pile of weeds that he had pulled the day before, ready to put in another full day's work.

We also appreciate his contributions for many years as recorder during the Christmas Bird Count

and for the many bird boxes he built and shared over the years. His last project for us was the new log sign now placed on the nature trail.



# Larch Hills Project

Dawn McDonald

After our outing to Sicamous this year Clint Smith asked if the Naturalist Club would be interested in upgrading the Interpretive Trail at the Larch Hills. There was interest in our group to explore the situation and the opportunities available. Clint is a long-time volunteer and advocate of the Larch Hills Trail system. I encourage you to go online to read about the development of this area. Originally opened in the 1920s and 30's by horse loggers such as Peter Thielman (John's grandfather) it was later developed into ski trails by efforts of Stig Keskinen, Erkki Keski-Salmi, Tom and Connie Crowley and a list too extensive to cover. I can remember skiing the area then on untracked trails using heavy, wide wooden skis while John Coffey and John McDonald struggled to break trail. The history of the emergence of the trail system brings forth so many familiar faces but it impresses upon me the depth of the community collaboration, commitment and hard work of hundreds of volunteers that have made these trails possible.

Along the more recently established snowshoe trail near the Hub we find the faded and outdated signs of the original Interpretive Trail that are in dire need of an upgrade. This trail was established over 40 years ago by the Ministry of Lands and Forests when it was still overseeing recreation sites and their upkeep, a service which was sadly stripped away. Signs give a nod to the regrowth from silviculture practices of the time. The government does maintain stewardship, however, with the surrounding Violet Creek Provincial Park area which protects Mara Meadows wetlands.

While teaching at Rancho Elementary I was in the company of volunteers who logged many hours with the Larch Hills Club and was soon introduced to this lovely little gem so easily accessible to local classes. Since the trail is single file the signs allow teachers and parents to learn in small groups as they walk the cushioned ground. One time when we wandered this trail we found owl pellets which brought on a lesson

of prodding and poking to see what the owner had been eating. The skunk cabbage by the creek grew so large and drew lessons about its usefulness to animals and First Nations people in spite of some who wrinkled their noses at the odour. One of my favourite exercises was to have students sit quietly in the little enchanted forest area and use their senses to connect with nature. That connection is what we strive to cultivate.

Lately Ed, Diane and I led a group of school children up the Main Road to introduce them to the beautiful wildflowers, trees and animals in the area. Although I have heard that most children can recognize up to a thousand logos but only know a few species of plants I was surprised how true that was on this day. Common species such as cedar, Douglas fir and hemlock could not be identified. Nevertheless, most were very interested in their surroundings even though one thought it was spooky and another admitted to being too engrossed in his iPad to pay much attention to nature as they traveled by car. I know teachers are working to facilitate nature studies but there is much on their plates. If our future citizens have so little connection to nature how will they understand the vast significance of an ecosystem and the importance of each of its members? The problem seems insurmountable but perhaps with small steps and the example of those who have striven to improve the Larch Hills with such great dedication we can be part of the solution.

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## Larch Hills Outing

### A note from your outing committee:

On September 19 we will walk the Interpretive Trail beginning at the South Hub. Dawn, Maureen and Clint will share some initial thoughts on the Naturalists' plan to enhance this lush forested trail with updated signage. Participants will also be encouraged to share their thoughts and observations. There will likely be many historical anecdotes shared as we browse for birds and other flora and fauna.

See your schedule for more details.

# Western Grebe Count Salmon Arm Bay

Report by Di Wittner:

**Date of count: June 06, 2019**

Viewing Location	Adults	Babies
Pierre's Pt/Sandy Pt	9	0
Eagle Homes	0	0
Peter Jannink Park	74	0
Wharf	1	0
	distressed	
	22	
Beaver pond	1	0
Viewing platform	8	0
Raven/furthest end of trail	2	0
Tappen/Sunnybrae/Canoe	2	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>0</b>

Notes:

- 6 loons in Tappen Bay
- Likely hidden nesters making the count slightly lower than *actual*. This proved to be the case in 2018.
- Some pairs still courting.

\* \* \* \* \*

**Date of count: July 15, 2019**

Viewing Location	Adults*	Young^
Pierre's Pt/Deep water	56	11
Eagle Homes	0	0
Peter Jannink Park	10	7
Wharf/Deep water	92	53
Beaver pond platform	21	11
Viewing platform	14	9
Raven/furthest end of trail	6	4
Tappen/Sunnybrae/Canoe	3	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>202</b>	<b>96</b>

Notes:

\*Some young are already in adult plumage. Those at some distance were, therefore, counted as adults. There's no way to estimate that number with any accuracy. ^Young denotes 'fuzzy'. Any juveniles that were already in adult plumage and viewed at considerable distance were counted as adults.

**TOTAL COUNT: 298** (much better count than June! Whew!)

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**Date of count: Aug 16, 2019**

Start time: 6: 20 am at Raven end of Foreshore Trail

End time: 10:03 am at Sunnybrae winery

Viewing Location	Adults & Juveniles (grouped together)
Sandy Point	28
Raven	2
Wharf	195
Beaver pond	55
Tappen Bay/Sunnybrae Park	21
Sunnybrae/Canoe	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>301</b>

Notes:

- Total count: **301**
- Noted about 5 young fuzzies (late youngsters)
- Excellent counting conditions this morning
- Managed to complete count before any boats in the water, yippee!
- Bit of rough water in Tappen Bay, may have affected count a bit but feel fairly confident with numbers
- Loons and red neck grebes (as usual), in Tappen Bay and Sunnybrae areas – not counted.

*See page 5 for count comparisons.*

# Nature in the Warm Land

## BC Nature AGM

Dorothy Parks writes:

The 2019 BC Nature Conference and AGM was hosted by the Cowichan Valley Naturalists and held in Duncan. Here are some of the presentations that Don and I enjoyed.

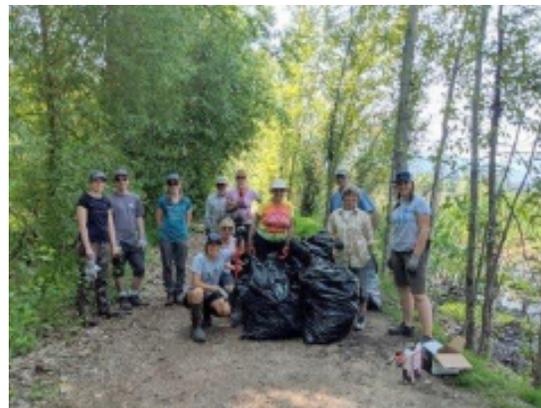
Friday’s keynote speaker, Dave Polster, is a renowned specialist in landscape reclamation. Over the years he has worked on drastically disturbed sites like mines, gravel pits and steep slopes. His axiom is ‘rough and loose’ as it applies to prepping surfaces for the use of living plants for structural purposes. Stakes of native species such as willow, cottonwood and dogwood provide conditions that foster the development of other species. Before and after photos, taken over the years, showed his successes. Dave is also active in the preservation of the Garry Oak ecosystems which are an integral part of the Valley. These systems are vulnerable to development and the effects of climate change.

Saturday’s keynote speaker was ethnobotanist Dr. Nancy Turner, a protégé of Dr. Mary Thomas, who shared information gained from decades of study and collaboration with First Nations Peoples. She was accompanied by Cowichan Tribe Elders.

There were presentations on local efforts to recover species. The Bring Back the Bluebirds Project is having encouraging success in re-establishing a Western Bluebird population to Vancouver Island, after they have been considered locally extinct for almost 20 years.

Another local effort was the Vancouver Island Marmot Recovery Program. A 16-year old student who is passionate about bats spoke about the 9 species of bats that live on the Island.

After enjoying the Conference, we explored the area for a few days. We had a short visit with Monica and Ed Dahl at their home in Royston. We found them busy and enjoying their large gardens.



### Invasive Weed Pull continues:

On May 29, 13 of our own volunteers, along with three young people from Nature Trust, filled 27 bags of woody nightshade. This brought the total number of bags that we had removed over the past four years to 284.

Continuing with this, we have, for a second time, got some outside help. Janet Aitken writes, “We hired Scott Girvan to work with the Invasive Species Society to continue to pull invasive weeds on the foreshore. We used the \$1000. grant from BC Nature to fund this. Scott and (sometimes) his Dad, Colin, have pulled a total of 48 bags.” This brings our total bag count to 332.

We hoped for another work-bee this fall. We will let you know if and when it is to happen.

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### Western Grebe Count Salmon Arm Bay, 2016-2019

Totals (adults & juveniles)	2016	2017	2018	2019
June count	235	254	123*	119*
July count	315	352	295	298
August count	327	296	272	301

\*Supposition: likely missed due to nesting in hidden area.

What may be most important is the August count which suggests the population is holding relatively stable for the past 4 years.

## Shuswap Naturalists' Award

*The Academic Award which we present each year to a Thompson Rivers University student in environmental studies will this year be given in honour of Marg Wrench.*

*Marg was a valued club member, showing a keen interest in nature. Her love for plant life was infectious. We appreciate the many years she served on the coffee committee and I especially enjoyed working with her as she headed the phone committee.*



*Margaret Wrench*

### Maureen Sigston shares:

Margaret (Isabel Swanston) was born on October 20, 1922 in Vancouver, BC. Her love of the outdoors developed early as she was raised in the then undeveloped, Seymour River area of North Vancouver. As the eldest of four children she learned responsibility at an early age.

Through perseverance and determination, she earned her teaching certificate. Her first teaching assignment was in Duncan, BC, where she taught seven grades - a challenge she always remembered.

In 1943, Margaret married Walter Wrench, who was discharged from the army in 1946. At that time, they built a house on a cow trail beside a small dairy in North Vancouver. After Walter was debilitated with rheumatoid arthritis, and while raising five children, Margaret resumed her teaching career. She became a well respected and admired teacher as well as a loving and caring mother.

In 1987, Margaret and Walter retired to Salmon Arm to be closer to their family. Sadly, Walter passed away in 1992. At the age of 72 years, with strength and resolve, Margaret acquired her driver's license.

She always demonstrated a love for nature - diligently donating to the Canadian Wildlife Federation, loving everybody's pets and spending hours in her well-kept garden. She became an active member of the Salmon Arm Garden Club, The Naturalist Club, Lawn Bowling Club and the Seniors' Centre.

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## Turtle Watch

### Pat Turner reports:

There is not a lot to say about the turtles of McGuire Lake, this year. Numbers were encouraging in early April, and there were 20 turtles basking on logs on April 20th – but that is the record for 2019. The hot weather in May probably persuaded some of them that it was time to head off to Shuswap Lake for cooler water, more food choice and to see friends and relations in the “big water”. However, 20 turtles is much less than other years, and there may be reasons for this. One possibility is the turtles do not enjoy the increasing number of ducks, who pre-empt the logs. One does occasionally see turtles and ducks on the same log, but my guess is that the ducks join the turtles, not the other way around.

The sudden cold spell at the end of February may have killed some of them off, as it would have coincided with the time turtles start waking up from winter hibernation. When I did see turtles on logs, there were few if any very small ones. Some of the logs have been in the lake for years, and seem to be coming waterlogged, so that turtles (and ducks) have their feet in water. Ducks do not appear to mind this, but perhaps turtles like to bask in the dry.

A patrol on July 29th, at noon, and very warm and sunny resulted in a grand total of two turtles, much less than counted at this time any other year.

## Bird Boxes 2019

Di Wittner writes:

This summer's addition of 50 new nest boxes along the foreshore gives us a total of 94. Data collection began in August and will continue through September. We are expecting a significant jump from the 29 successfully fledged broods of 2018! (See the next newsletter for complete stats.)



Gianna Ragsdale, the summer student at the Brighthouse Nature Centre, helping Di with a few boxes.

We are indebted to the hard work of MakerSpace who generously offered to build the new boxes. The following organizations contributed to the success of this project:

BC Naturalists Foundation, Rona, South Canoe Elementary School, BC Nature, Warner Rentals and USNR.

Also thank-you to Roger Beardmore, Patrick Shea, Thomas Briginshaw, Nan Prittie, Pat Hutchins and Cathy Meakes.

**Note:** *And a big thank you to Roger and Di for your hard work in digging the holes and putting up those poles for the bird boxes.*

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**A note from the SaveShuswapSongbird Committee:**

Here is an interesting link you might like to check out: <https://www.birdsbesafe.com>

## Fall Outing Schedule

Thurs. Sept. 12 – Eagle River Nature Trails

9:00 - Arena Parking beside Junglemania  
Leaders: Hanne, Marie, Dawn and Pat

Thurs. Sept. 19 – Larch Hills

9:00 - Arena Parking beside Junglemania  
Leaders: Dawn McDonald, Maureen Sigston, Clint Smith

Thurs. Oct. 3 – Bergerac Lakes

9:30 - Arena Parking beside Junglemania  
10:00 – 7610 Cambie Road  
Leader: Marie Fortin

Thurs. Oct. 17- Salmon Arm Bay Foreshore

10:00 - SABNES Parking Lot  
Leader: Ed McDonald

See your schedule for outing details.  
Thank-you outing committee.

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*“Instructions for living the life. Pay attention. Be astonished. Tell about it.”*

Mary Oliver

\* \* \* \* \*

## Insects are essential to our ecology



Ed found this vole, drowned in our little pond.

Within 20 minutes, a sexton beetle was feasting on it. Soon, another six beetles joined in. By the hour, less and less of the vole was to be seen.

When we checked the next morning, there was nothing left but the tail.

