

Spring, 2022

# The Central Okanagan Naturalists' Club

www.okanagannature.org



*Know Nature and Keep it  
Worth Knowing*

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**Monthly Meetings: 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday of the month. Members continue to meet via Zoom.**

- The next general meeting is the annual Pot Luck picnic scheduled for Tuesday June 14, 2022, at Bertram Creek Regional Park. Further details will be provided in an email to all members.
- The subsequent general meeting takes place on September 13.

## WELCOME NEW CONC MEMBERS!

Our club has been growing and thriving, even with the complications of paused activities and member meetings taking place by Zoom, rather than in-person, due to COVID 19.

We want to welcome our recent new members. Now that activities are back on and in-person meetings are anticipated to take place in the near future, we look forward to meeting you in the natural world.

- |                 |                |                             |
|-----------------|----------------|-----------------------------|
| • Anne MacLean  | • John Lopes   | • Evelyn & Dave Wotherspoon |
| • Brenda Gooder | • Val Hardy    | • Joanne Van Snellenberg    |
|                 | • Tessa Tesluk |                             |

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

BY DOUGLAS GRAHAM

Hi Members,

A warm welcome to the new members who have joined us in the last months and hello to our stalwart members, who I might actually get to meet in the next months as we gradually thaw out from the COVID freeze on socializing. By the time you read this newsletter, our marquee event of the year will have successfully concluded: our hosting of the BC Nature AGM (Annual General Meeting) attended by nearly a hundred persons from across BC. I can confidently say "will have successfully concluded" because I have the utmost confidence in the incredible team who have worked so hard on this over the last year (led by Fran Fisher and Rick Gee). In the next newsletter, we'll have some more details on the AGM and its outcomes.

Also, you'll soon be receiving a few more details about our marquee event #2 of the year: our annual picnic on June 14. It's special this year for many reasons: i) it's the first time in 3 years it's actually taking place; ii) it's the first post-COVID CONC non-outing event where we will meet in person; iii) we will celebrate our 60th birthday; and iv) our daughter Camille will celebrate her 30th on that day! I hope you will be able to join us for the picnic.

CONC has been coming back to life in lots of other ways. Our outings continue strongly, for birding, botany, and for hiking (thanks to Mike Howard, Peter Courtney, and the many leaders involved). Under Mike Whitaker's leadership, the Conservation Committee has re-emerged and is moving forward defining areas where CONC can make a contribution. Ideas and initiatives are emerging on the all-important outreach front, to bring in new members. Marjorie Gonzalez is modernizing us with a CONC Facebook page which will shortly go live. We will also participate with a booth in the 1 July celebrations in Kelowna.

As I write this, I'm sitting in a hotel in Monrovia, Liberia with the rain pouring down, no internet, and the electricity shutting off every few hours. I'm reading discouraging reports of poverty and widespread forest and biodiversity loss. It reminds me to be thankful for what we just take for granted in BC — and it also makes me hope we'll get some of that rain in the Central Okanagan this summer!

Stay well and safe, Douglas

**Central Okanagan Naturalists' Club** [www.okanagannature.org](http://www.okanagannature.org)  
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 Email [info@okanagannature.org](mailto:info@okanagannature.org) for any general enquiry

**EXECUTIVE - 2022-23**

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**MONTHLY MEETINGS:**

- 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday of the month, September to June, 7:00 p.m. at Evangel Church, 3261 Gordon Drive, Kelowna.
- NOTE: **MEETINGS ARE CURRENTLY BY ZOOM ONLY!**
- Visitors are welcome.
- Hosts (when meeting in person resume): Bev Thomas & Liz Daley. Please bring your own cup.

**MEMBERSHIP:** Karen Pedersen [membership@okanagannature.org](mailto:membership@okanagannature.org)

- **ANNUAL DUES:** Single \$35, Family \$47, Students \$14. Includes the quarterly newsletter. (Additional \$10 annual charge for newsletters sent by mail).
- **MEMBERSHIP FORM AND WAIVER:** Available on the CONC website: [www.okanagannature.org](http://www.okanagannature.org). Send your name, address, telephone number, email address, waiver form and dues to: CONC Membership, Box 21128, Orchard Park P.O., Kelowna, B.C. V1Y 9N8.
- **DUES:** Dues may also be paid by e-transfer to [membership@okanagannature.org](mailto:membership@okanagannature.org). Please note your full name(s) in the field for providing additional information.
- **HONOURARY LIFE MEMBERS:** Hugh Westheuser, Pat Westheuser, Eileen Dillabough, Cec Dillabough, Arthur Hughes-Games (deceased), Brenda Thomson (deceased), Muriel Westwood (deceased), Harry Almond (deceased)

**NEWSLETTER:** Editors - Lisa Rae & Vivian Manning

- Next deadline date for submissions is August 15, 2022
- Send submissions to [editor@okanagannature.org](mailto:editor@okanagannature.org)
- Email distribution: Karen Pedersen [membership@okanagannature.org](mailto:membership@okanagannature.org)

**ACTIVITIES: All activities are seasonal. All outing details are on our calendar at our website. If in doubt, check with the activity contact, or contact any of the Executive.**

**BIRDING: contact: [birding@okanagannature.org](mailto:birding@okanagannature.org)**

- **Monday Birding:** meet 7:45 a.m. (April-Sept.) or 8:45 a.m. (Oct-March) at the Apple Bowl\*
- **Thursday Birding:** meet 7:45 a.m. (April-Sept.) or 8:45 a.m. (Oct-March) at the Apple Bowl\*
- **Saturday Birding:** 2nd Saturday of month - meet 7:45 a.m. (April-Sept) or 8:45 a.m. (Oct-March) at the Apple Bowl\*

**TIMES SUBJECT TO CHANGE!**

**NOTE: NO BIRDING ACTIVITIES IN AUGUST**

**BOTANY: contact: [botany@okanagannature.org](mailto:botany@okanagannature.org)**

- **Friday Botany** trips meet according to emailed details sent for each outing by Botany Director Peter Courtney (Spring to Fall)

**HIKES: All hikers meet at the Apple Bowl\* (Bring a lunch)**

- **Tuesday: Ramblers** contact Robert Lake: (250) 215-3211
- **Wednesday: Sole Survivors** contact Sherrell Davidson (250) 864-4007 & Gerda Watts (250) 862-1925
- **Thursday: Ramblers Plus** contact Robert Lake (250) 215-3211

\*Apple Bowl: 1555 Burtch Road - Apple Bowl parking lot, corner of Burtch and Bernard

## UPCOMING ACTIVITIES:

### OKANAGAN MOUNTAIN PARK BIRD & CRITTER COUNT, JUNE 4<sup>TH</sup>

BY LES GYUG

This is a reminder that the Okanagan Mountain Provincial Park Bird & Critter Count will be held this year on (or about) Saturday June 4, 2022. The count takes place on more than one day so that more can participate. The actual counting is done on a number of separate trails or routes, with anywhere from 10-15 routes done per year. The count has been held annually on the last weekend in May or first weekend in June (almost) every year since 1993, sponsored by our club, and with assistance from others at the south (Naramata) end of the park.

All members, guests and others are welcome, keeping in mind that we'll still meet (or exceed) whatever COVID public health measures are in place at the time. I will be contacting the route leaders from past years as we get closer to count date, but feel free to contact me if you'd like to participate. **Les Gyug, Phone (250) 769-5907**

## ACTIVITIES AND OUTINGS REPORTS:

### CONC OUTING ACTIVITIES UPDATE

BY VIVIAN MANNING

CONC activities continue to take place, with **Botany outings now taking place every Friday morning!** Activity details and organizer contact information can be found on the CONC website calendar: [www.okanagannature.org](http://www.okanagannature.org) and on the 2nd page of this newsletter.

**Birding** outings continue with three formats: the Monday group starts at one location and walks a predetermined route for a few hours, while the Thursday group travels to several sites by way of carpooling. The Saturday group travels on day-long excursions that allow our member birders to explore areas between Osoyoos and Salmon Arm. Mike Howard is the Birding Director and may be contacted for additional details: [birding@okanagannature.org](mailto:birding@okanagannature.org).

- For details of past Birding outings, [please see Margaret's birding report below](#).
- For details of past Botany outings, [please see Peter's Botany Report below](#).



**Hiking (Sole Survivors and Ramblers)** continues enthusiastically on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays, with excursions by the Sole Survivors to Black Mountain, Rose Valley and Eagle Bluff and excursions by the Ramblers to Kalamoior from Hatch Winery, Wilden, Knox Mountain and Coyote Ridge, among many other locations. Both groups joined up for a large group hike to Bear Creek to enjoy the many wildflowers and trails on the west side.



## BIRDING REPORT

BY MARGARET BRYAN



Great Blue Heron - Photo Credit: Pam Laing

**February 2**, we headed for Winfield, stopping at McCarthy Road for a short walk where we heard a Brown Creeper. At the boat launch, we saw: 4 Trumpeter Swans, 1 adult Bald Eagle, and 2 River Otters on the icy lake.

**February 10**, the Thursday crew went to the Philpott Road area in what was unusually warm winter weather. We found the prized Chestnut-backed Chickadee at two different feeders. Also seen were five species of woodpeckers: American Three-toed Woodpecker, Piliated Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, and Northern Flicker. We also spotted a Steller's Jay and a Canada Jay.

**February 17**, the weather continued to be mild. Our first stop was Maude Roxby Bird Sanctuary where we saw: 1 Pintail Duck, 1 Green-winged Teal, and, 1 Gadwall. We then visited a frozen Munson Pond and saw: 1 White-crowned Sparrow, 1 Northern Shrike, and, 1 Black-capped Chickadee. A large flock of Mallards were flushed by a Bald Eagle that appeared to be carrying a plastic dog waste bag. Behind the Capital News Center, we saw 18 Trumpeter Swans.

**February 24**, 8 birders met under bright crisp skies to check the west side of the lake. We walked through Bear Creek Park and saw: Hooded Merganser Red-breasted Nuthatches, Common Loon, and, American Robins.

After the walk Margaret Ramsey invited us to her home to view her bird feeders. Here we saw: Common Redpoll, Hoary Redpoll, Pine Siskins, and, American Goldfinch.

**March 3**, despite a cold rain, we had a good turnout of 18 birders and headed to the June Springs area. We observed a number of species on Miller Road, including: Red-breasted Nuthatch, Pygmy Nuthatch, Spotted Towhee and, Northern Flicker. On Mathews Road we saw a Downy Woodpecker and Varied Thrush, and also heard a Northern Pygmy Owl. We checked out Luxmoore Road, and further up June Springs Road, but rain and fog came in and limited the sight and sound of birds, so we decided to head home.



American Wigeon - Photo Credit: Pam Laing



Pygmy Nuthatch - Photo Credit: Pam Laing

**March 10**, we were greeted by sunny skies as we headed up Beaver Lake Road. We spotted Ravens and an adult Bald Eagle as we passed the sanitary landfill. Further up Beaver Lake Road, we saw at least 20 White-tailed deer and several Red-tailed Hawk, including a very pale morph. Meadowlarks were singing and a Northern Shrike was seen. The abundant buttercups were a true sign of spring.

**March 12**, saw our first Saturday birding outing in two years - a sign of the pandemic finally fading. Thirteen birders headed south under rainy skies, which quickly turned sunny. A massive raft of Coots was observed under the William R. Bennett bridge. We walked around the Sicomous to see: Common Merganser, Pied-billed Grebe, Horned Grebe and, Great Blue Heron A muskrat was also seen. On White Lake Road, we saw Mule Deer, along with: Red Crossbill, Trumpeter Swans, Spotted Towhee, Western and Mountain Bluebirds, and Western Meadowlarks. At Vauseux Lake cliffs, we saw a Golden Eagle. Nine Mountain Goats were seen on the cliffs north of Summerland.

**March 17**, Stu Wier led a total of 17 birders to Munson Pond. We walked in from Burtch Road, meeting Howard Braun near the bird feeders. Birds seen included: American Wigeon, Lesser Scaup, Hooded Merganser, Gadwall, and Sharp-shinned Hawk. Red-tailed Hawks were mating in the trees north of the pond. We had time to visit Maude Roxby Bird Sanctuary to see Green-winged Teal, Common Loon and a Coyote.

**March 24**, was bright and sunny for a group of 12 birders. We headed first to Casorso Bridge where we saw: Tree Swallows, Common Goldeneye, and, American Goldfinch. Stopping part way up the hill gave us a Spring treat - a pair of Say's Phoebe. We then traveled up Hughes Road, above Swamp Road. Quail were plentiful, Northern Shoveler were in the pond on the valley floor and a Turkey Vulture soared overhead. Kamloops Road was the place for Killdeer and an American Kestrel gave us a fly-by.

**March 31**, we gathered at the old Ferry Dock. At Bear Creek Road, we saw a Great Horned Owl and Ruby-crowned Kinglets. On the walk around Goldies Pond, we spotted Golden-crowned Kinglets, bringing our total number of birds observed to 31 species.

**April 7**, was the first date for which we had an 8:00AM start, with 13 early birders present and ready to walk the rail trail behind Scandia. This was followed by the first coffee gathering at Specialty Bakery in two years. After this we walked around Chichester Marsh. Birds seen included: Ring-necked Pheasant, Yellow-rumped Warbler for a total of 32 species.



White-crowned Sparrow - Photo Credit: Pam Laing



American Kestrel - Photo Credit: Pam Laing

**April 9**, Nine birders headed north to Vernon. On the way, we stopped at Robert Lake where we saw an assortment of ducks. We continued to Kekuli Bay, where birds included: Western Meadowlark, Turkey Vulture, Yellow-rumped Warbler, and, best of all, a Pacific Wren. O'Keefe Pond was filled with ducks including Northern Shoveler and Canvasback. At Otter Lake we saw American Wigeon, Northern Harrier and heard a Greater Yellowlegs. The tree plantation gave us a Great Horned Owl. At Bailies Pond we saw Brown-headed Cowbirds.

**April 14**, 9 birders headed up Beaver Lake Road for: Western Meadowlark, Mountain Bluebirds, Say's Phoebe, and a large flock of Dark-eyed Juncos. Here, a Red Crossbill had a close escape from a Sharp-shinned Hawk. Tree Swallows and Western Bluebirds were perched by the nesting boxes. Some of us spotted a very early Western Tanager.

**April 24**, we headed to the Belgo Pond area, a place we haven't visited in some time. The stop at Garrier Pond gave us our first-of-year Barn Swallows. We then headed to Gopher Creek for a special treat and a lifer for some - a Lesser Goldfinch. Other birds included: Sharp-shinned Hawk, American Goldfinch, and, Pine Siskin. We then headed up Old Joe Rich Road where Western Meadowlarks were singing. While leaving the area, we saw at least 30 Mountain Bluebirds.

**April 28**, 10 birders headed up Highway 33 under clear skies. A walk at Three Forks Park gave us: Blue-winged Teal, Bald Eagle, Varied Thrush, Red-naped Sapsucker, and the sound of a Greater Yellowlegs. Two Moose were seen as we turned off the highway. At the Nordic Ski area, we saw: a Pileated Woodpecker, Northern Rough-winged Swallows (courting) and Mountain Bluebirds. Our last stop was by the cliffs where the Swallows nest. In total, we had 40 species for the day.

It seems that Short-tailed Albatross had feeding grounds off Vancouver Island before the feather hunters drove their numbers to near extinction. Between the 1880's and the 1930's, entire breeding colonies were lost. Once numbering in the millions, the Short-tailed Albatross are now at 1% of the pre-hunting population and are classified as threatened. New discoveries may reverse the trend. Despite having a wide range over the Pacific, these birds prefer specific feeding grounds. Foraging patterns have been analyzed using the chemical footprints of isotopic compositions found in preserved bones on the west coast of Vancouver Island. These birds have a two-meter wingspan, pink bills and white and grey feathers that fade to yellow on their heads.

## RARE BIRD REPORT

BY DOUGLAS GRAHAM

Rare bird records from the Regional District of Central Okanagan (RDCO) are reported through various sources such as eBird and as compiled by Chris Charlesworth on the BC Rare Bird Alert. This note covers the 2022 spring period from 26 February to 28 May 2022. Thanks are extended to Mike Howard, Birding Director, for his review. There were a lot of great records in the last few months, topped by our first Black Turnstone!

**Cackling Geese** of the Pacific race *minima* continued in the area with many records and photos from various observers from 3 March to 17 April. A great record of the Eurasian race *crecca* of the **Green-winged Teal** was noted from Robert Lake from 12 March-11 April (first found by David Bell). I saw one myself at the end of the month (but I'll admit, it was in Hungary...). On 1 April Chris Charlesworth also reported from Munson Pond an intergrade between the New World and Old World races.

On 13 April at Kinsmen Park, Nick Swan photographed (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S106948509>) a **hybrid Northern Shoveler x Blue-winged Teal**. This terrific record was one of the best local records of the season. It is the first such hybrid reported from the Okanagan in eBird. Parenthetically, the first published BC record of a Northern Shoveler x Blue-winged Teal hybrid was a male seen on 10 May 1980 near Williams Lake by yours truly: "Sightings of Hybrid "Blue-winged" Ducks (*Anas*) in British Columbia. J. M. Cooper and D. J. Graham, Contributions to Natural Sciences 1: 1-2" (the paper also covered several of our observations of Blue-winged Teal x Cinnamon Teal hybrids).

**Clark's Grebe** (and hybrid **Western x Clark's**) were reported 28 April 2022 at the mouth of Mission Creek (David Bell).



Marbled Godwit  
Photo Credit: Paul Malkinson

There were many great shorebird records in this period. On 26 April a very rare **Marbled Godwit** was found at the mouth of Mission Creek by Nick Swan and then was seen by many observers through to 30 April. Even more sensational, a **Black Turnstone** was found on 3 May at the mouth of Mission Creek by Huw Williams and then seen by many observers. In eBird, this was the first record from the Central Okanagan.



Black Turnstone  
Photo Credit: Paul Malkinson

Michelle Hamilton had a **Short-billed Dowitcher** on 19 May at Robert Lake. An uncommon **Sanderling** was at Mission Creek 26-27 May.

A **Sabine's Gull** (first noted by Nick Swan) was seen on the lake May 19 & 24. One or two pale **Iceland Gulls**, reported in the last Rare Birds report, continued to be seen throughout the spring, usually at Maude-Roxby, from 26 Feb. through to at least 28 April. In eBird, observers reported these individuals in 4 or 5 different ways: as the species, as the race *kumlieni*, as the race *glaucoides*, or as various intergrades between subspecies! In the past years, two or three other names have been given in eBird to similar pale Iceland Gulls. Clearly, at least if we are talking about records of the same bird, not all the different names can be correct!

The taxonomy of Iceland Gulls is complex and confusing and has received many different treatments over the years. Your older field guide may still separate out Thayer's Gulls from Iceland Gulls, before they were merged into one species. Without going into great detail here, the Iceland Gull is a species with clinal variation, that is, changing gradually across its range without distinct shifts in appearance. One characteristic (but not the only one) that varies clinally is the overall darkness. Putting a subspecies name on any given bird or population is a subjective and controversial exercise and should be interpreted as meaning "has the characteristics of most of the birds found in that part of its range". There are generally three recognized subspecies: darker *thayeri* in the west, paler *kumlieni* in the eastern Arctic, and the even paler *glaucoides* further east. The vast majority of our Iceland Gulls, if you want to use a subspecies label, can be reliably called "Iceland Gull (Thayer's) (*Larus glaucoides thayeri*)", as they are the darker birds typical of those breeding in the western Arctic, the form to be expected in BC.

The subspecies *glaucoides* breeds in Greenland and are known in winter off Newfoundland. Of course, gulls can wander widely, and they do, but unless recorded with extremely good documentation, a record of this race or a form intergrading with it, seems unlikely in interior BC (note that most of the eBird records of our Maude-Roxby birds were noted, without explanation, as intergrades between *kumlieni* and *glaucoides*...).

A bird with characteristics close to those of the breeding birds of the eastern Arctic (*kumlieni*) would be expected to be rare in interior BC but local gull experts (Michael Force, Chris Charlesworth) tell me there are acceptable records from the Okanagan. Calling a bird an "Iceland Gull (*kumlieni*) (*Larus glaucoides kumlieni*)" should be reserved for cases where a number of different characteristics (not just paleness) have been noted which indicate the bird is typical of that subspecies. IMO, to be used only by expert observers and only if backed up with a detailed description and photographs.

So, what should we call our pale Iceland Gulls from Maude-Roxby mentioned in this report? I didn't see any documentation that suggests they met the threshold of being a "typical" *kumlieni*. Unless an experienced observer puts forward such information, my suggestions are the following:

- 1) "Iceland Gull (*Larus glaucoides*)". Provided you are sure of the species identification, this is the safest and most correct identification. Unless the observer has sufficient knowledge to age the gull and to understand the dizzying variability of the different subspecies and plumages, this is a great choice! You can always add a description (and photo if possible).
- 2) "Iceland Gull (*thayeri/kumlieni*) (*Larus glaucoides thayeri/kumlieni*)". If an experienced observer is confident an observed pale gull is on the spectrum between *thayeri* and *kumlieni* but not typical of either of those extremes, this name could be used. It should be backed up with a justifying description and photographs if possible. This choice is virtually never used in our area because, as Chris Charlesworth has noted to me, although it is a reasonable choice, for some reason it does not come up in eBird as an option when using the app. It can however be chosen from the web site version.

All clear?! Gull IDs are not for everyone!!

An **Arctic Tern** was off Mission Creek on 21 May (Ryan Tomlinson). A **Black Tern** was on Robert Lake on 22 May.

A pretty sensational **Green Heron** was noted in Peachland on 11 May (Richard Millie), never previously noted in eBird in the spring in the Central Okanagan. Evan Lewis found a rare **Great Egret** at Munson Pond on 23 May and it has obligingly stuck around through to the end of this reporting period.



Great Egret - Photo Credit: Bruce Kennedy

A **Red-tailed Hawk x Rough-legged Hawk hybrid** was reported by Blair Dudeck on 31 March, with some terrific photos (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S105975631>) and was accepted into eBird, a hybrid that has not been previously reported from the Central Okanagan on that platform. I wasn't initially sure it was a "slam-dunk id" but Chris Charlesworth and David Bell both noted to me that they were confident with the identification.



Hoary Redpoll - Photo Credit: John Ramsay

In the last Rare Birds report, I noted that late February reports of **Hoary Redpoll** (referring to a bird conveniently being seen at our Treasurer's home in West Kelowna) were not confirmed. Subsequently, to Mike's and Margaret's relief, Chris Charlesworth confirmed the identification from photos! A bit like the situation described above with Iceland Gull, its actually very challenging to pinhole a redpoll as a Common or a Hoary, as they clinally vary from one form to the other. Probably one day the two species will be merged and then we'll have to figure out how to label the rarer pale or intermediate birds!

A very early **Savannah Sparrow** was heard on March 13 at Robert Lake (Michael Force). On 21 April, a lucky CONC Thursday birding group were treated to a remarkable male **Lesser Goldfinch**, along Gopher Creek Trail (reported in eBird by Mike Howard and others). The species is very rare in the central Okanagan but interestingly, was recorded at the exact same location in the winter of 2020. The species was recorded again on 25 April at Munson Pond. On 14 May, Michael and Joanna Preston reported a rare **Palm Warbler** from Beaver Lake Road.

A few notable EARLY records include:

- 24 Mar.: Dunlin (Nick Swan)
- 31 Mar.: Barn Swallow (David Bell)
- 31 Mar.: Cliff Swallow (Kalin Ocaña)
- 6 April: Common Poorwill (Megan Buers)
- 19 April: Black-chinned Hummingbird (Mike Howard & Maggie Getz)
- 5 May: Olive-sided Flycatcher (Michelle Hamilton)

Notable LATE records include:

- 1 May: American Tree Sparrow (Jessica Thompson & Gregory Turner)
- 23 May: a flock of 30 Snow Geese (Ted Hindmarch)
- 26 May: Baird's Sandpiper (Evan Lewis)



**Ballhead Waterleaf**  
*Hydrophyllum capitatum*

Spring has brought a lot of flowering plants to the Okanagan. As well, mushrooms began appearing in April and hopefully with some significant moisture they'll continue to fruit until the frost sets in. However, Kelowna's April was the third driest in the 117 years records have been kept so we're not off to a good start.

CONC's regular Friday outings started on May 6 with a trip to Beaver Lake Road. This was the first official botany excursion since the start of the pandemic. We made 5 stops as far up the road as Km 7 looking for flowering plants. Eleven attendees counted 46 species of flowering plants and were pleased to see large horizons of Arrowleaf Balsamroot and smaller flushes of Skunk Cabbage, Western Springbeauty, and Small-Flowered Woodland Star. Particularly distinctive plants included Chocolate Lily, Chocolate Tips, and Ballhead Waterleaf. Four people participated in the second excursion to Knox Mountain on May 13 and they found 52 species of

flowering plants including 8 species of mustards and striking plants such as Bitterroot, Thread-leaved Phacelia, Linear-leaved Daisy, and Swale Desert-Parsley. Ten people participated in the third excursion to Mission Creek Regional Park on May 20 where at least 79 species were recorded at the Scenic Canyon (Hollywood Rd South) and Mindy Tran locations. Notable finds were Striped Coralroot, Mountain Lady-Slipper, and Cornsalad. Checklists of expected species were used and final lists of what was found were produced. The ongoing botany schedule is posted on CONC's webpage.

In 2016 the CONC botany group discovered an unusual plant called Steer's Head and has been monitoring it ever since. An article about our work on this species was published in the Winter 2020 edition of BC Nature. Steer's Head appears for 3-4 weeks in late April and early May in the old Crystal Mountain Ski area. This year flowering started earlier than usual in the third week of April. We've been sharing our yearly observations with Steer's Head researchers in Northern California. CONC has worked with one of the land lease holders to try and protect the Steer's Head as well as other rare plants that grow in this area.



**Chocolate Lily** *Fritillaria affinis*

As the season progresses a good way to monitor the plants and other wildlife is to check in on iNaturalist projects in our area such as the ongoing Mission Creek Greenway Biodiversity Project at <https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/mission-creek-greenway-biodiversity-project> and the UBC Okanagan BioInventory at <https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/ubc-okanagan-bioinventory>



**Bitterroot** *Lewisia rediviva*

The period of May through July is peak flowering time in the Kelowna area; May and June at the lower elevations and mid-June to end of July at the higher elevations. During this interval you should find wild flowering plants pretty much everywhere.

With respect to recent and upcoming events the annual botany spring forays in Washington were completed at the end of April and in mid-May. Read more about the Study Weekend (April 29-May 1) at <https://www.wnps.org/wnps-annual-events/study-weekend> and Botany Washington (May 12-15) at <https://www.wnps.org/calendar/1465>. Unfortunately our comparable event for BC, BotanyBC has been cancelled but the organizing committee says it may schedule a smaller event - see [Botany BC website](#) for updates. The Meadowlark Nature Festival featured a number of

excursions with botanical elements this year, in particular Terry McIntosh's May 21 White Lake Walk. Finally, CONC hosted 2 botany forays focusing on Beaver Lake Road during the May 27-28 AGM.

CONC members participated in the Johns Family Park 2022 Survey on May 14 where observations of birds, mammals, reptiles, insects and plants were made while walking several of the trails in the park. At least 40 species of flowering and 31 not flowering plants were recorded. Four or 5 species of mushrooms were also found including 2 species of morels.

We don't get up as early as the birders and we don't walk as far as the hikers but we do enjoy great scenery, fresh air and good company. Details of when and where we meet are provided on CONC's webpage and in email notifications to the members. If you have questions or suggestions regarding this year's activities please forward them to [botany@okanagannature.org](mailto:botany@okanagannature.org).



**Swale Desert-Parsley** *Lomatium ambiguum*

**Photo Credits (for all photos in this article): Peter Courtney**



After a 2-year break due to Covid, it felt good to get back to cleaning up the two parks which we have worked on for many years: Mindy Tran Memorial Park and Maude Roxby Bird Sanctuary. The clean-up was appropriately scheduled for Earth Day, Friday, April 22, 2022. We were blessed with warm sunny weather; the sky only clouded over as I was returning the bin to the Parks Department.

Fifteen CONC members, dressed in their garden clothes, donned bright yellow vests and supplied with 'pickup sticks', and burlap bags for the waste, headed out to their assigned areas.

As in the previous clean-up year, Cherry Hill Coffee kindly donated large burlap bags for the collection of waste, as a more ecologically responsible container than plastic bags.



Mindy Tran Memorial Park, the larger of the two areas, required the heaviest lifting. The area around the bus stops on Springfield filled two very large bags but time didn't allow for a full cleanup, much to the disappointment of the two volunteers. The second area, Maude Roxby Bird Sanctuary, benefited from a very good cleaning this year. The two gals who walked beside the boardwalk found a lot of surprises under there!

As the club has been dedicated to those two parks for many years, it was suggested that it might be time to explore other areas that may also benefit from cleaning. If any members have a suggestion of alternate places, please send the names along to me.



## JOHNS FAMILY NATURE CONSERVANCY REGIONAL PARK SURVEY REPORT

BY EVE WEGSCHEIDLER AND MIKE HOWARD



**Nesting Cooper's Hawk**  
Photo Credit: Bruce Kennedy

Members of the Central Okanagan Naturalists Club conduct an annual survey of the Johns Family Nature Conservancy Regional Park for the property trustees, the Central Okanagan Land Trust (COLT). The survey covers avifauna, mammals and reptiles similar to the Critter Count that is carried out for the adjacent Okanagan Mountain Provincial Park. The results provide the trustee with a permanent record of species and a snapshot indication of the changes occurring in the park year over year. This in turn assists COLT in their plans for the continued management of the property under their care.

The 2022 survey occurred on Saturday May 14 under overcast drizzly skies and unseasonably cool temperature. The weather however did not deter the twenty-one volunteers who surveyed the entire property. In addition to recording the occurrence of

fauna, a photographic record of plant groups was compiled. These photographs were subsequently submitted to iNaturalist as a record of species occurrences on the Johns Family property.

Avifauna results were similar to 2021, with 54 compared to 55 species the previous year. The number of individuals were down from 566 to 485, reflecting the weather conditions. The cool weather also kept reptiles and many of the insects in their burrows or shelters and the numbers of small mammals (Yellow-bellied marmots, Columbian ground squirrel, Red Squirrel and Yellow-pine chipmunk) were lower than in previous years.

A female black bear with her two cubs did grace two of the study teams this year. A Snowshoe Hare and four alert White Tailed Deer were observed, while Mule



**Heartleaf Arnica**  
Photo Credit: Ian Walker

Deer and their predators were not seen but their presence was confirmed in the park by tracks and skat.

The organisers wish to thank this year's team of volunteers:

Bruce Kennedy, Deborah White, Grant Halm, Hugh Westheuser, Ian Walker, Jasmine Korcok, Jen Matthews, Judie Steeves, Julie Dyck, Kajola Morewood, Les Gyug, Linda Walker, Lisa Rae, Merle Auty, Michelle Hamilton, Peter Courtney, Rick Gee, Simon Pethick and Vivian Manning,



**Dusky Flycatcher**  
Photo Credit: Vivian Manning



**Columbian Ground Squirrel**  
Photo Credit: Vivian Manning



**Red Squirrel**  
Photo Credit: Linda Walker



**Female Black Bear and cubs**  
Photo Credit: Grant Halm

The weather was perfect for the 2022 Birdathon on Sunday, May 22nd. Though we began at 6am in a chilly +3C we finished our efforts at +23C. This year's the Wilson's Warblers team consisted of Gwynneth Wilson (leader), Elke Fischer, Joyce Fraser, Annette Lachaine, Carol Sharplin and myself. We birded within the Kelowna half of the Christmas Bird Count Circle to reduce our mileage and covered a variety of habitats, thanks to Gwynneth's careful planning of the route. We tallied a respectable 94 species in the 8 hours. The best birds were White-winged Scoters, off the mouth of Mission Creek, and Black-necked Stilts and Pectoral Sandpiper at Robert Lake.

Thank you to all who have sponsored the Birdathon again. As our total is down somewhat from last year you might be glad to know it is not too late to donate. Please try to give if you can before the end of June as I will be sending in the money to Birds Canada shortly afterwards. You can use the following link (which can provide an instant tax receipt).

<https://www.canadahelps.org/en/charities/bird-studies-canada/p2p/birdathon22/team/wilsons-warblers/member/pam-laing/>

Or, if you prefer, send me a personal e-transfer to [pamlaing2309@gmail.com](mailto:pamlaing2309@gmail.com) and I will send one cheque for all the money I have received. You can also mail a cheque directly to Birds Canada at:

Birds Canada  
115 Front Rd.,  
Port Rowan, ON  
N0E 1M0

Mark your envelope *Birdathon 2022*, attention Kris Dobney. Be sure to include your email address and your full mailing address so that your tax receipt can be emailed or mailed to you when ready. Thank you again.

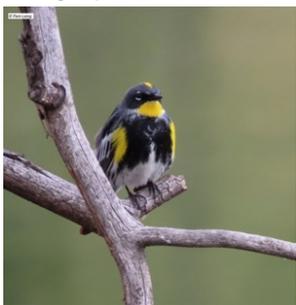
## BLACK MOUNTAIN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PROJECT

BY PAM LAING



Once again, this year I am leading a birdwatching project with the Grade Three classes at Black Mountain Elementary School. A Zoom presentation of fifteen common local birds was first, featuring photos and bird songs. We have since enjoyed two birding walks, with the third to come next week. The children use small binoculars which are on loan from the Central Okanagan School District 23. Each walk lasts about an hour, and we typically see about 15 to 20 species. The habitat behind the school features a marsh and pond, a creek-side trail and various trees and shrubs. Not all the same species are seen by all the classes, of course, which adds to the interest.

Some of the most common birds seen, and easily recognized, are Mallard, Red-winged Blackbird, California Quail, American Robin, American Coot and Song Sparrow.



Today we were lucky to see a Rufous Hummingbird male close by flashing his orange throat feathers to great appreciation. One class saw a Red-tailed Hawk and a Northern Shoveler male, the other class saw an American Goldfinch male, which they enjoyed, and a pair of Yellow-rumped Warblers. I wonder what the third class will find next week?



Photo Credits (for all photos in this article): Pam Laing

I've been collecting and identifying mushrooms for close to 45 years, and each fall for the past 20 years I've taught a few introductory mushroom identification courses for our local community college here in south central BC. It's a short course, so the best that can be achieved is to give participants an introductory orientation to what can be an overwhelmingly detailed field. I see it as a doorway into an engaging and fascinating hobby.

Many people arrive with one or two field guides and a lot of questions. They've leafed through their guide hoping to identify their find, only to discover that the illustrations for many different species seem to match it. Which one is it? Additionally, when out in the field they're soon overwhelmed by the never-ending variety of mushrooms. Their eyes glaze over after they've been introduced to fifty or more species in quick succession. So how to bring some order and method to making sense of all this information? Here's the approach I take.

Some people learn best by starting with specific information, expanding outwards, and then building upon it. Conversely, some people learn best by having the broad outline before them, as a framework upon which they can attach new information as they learn it. I try to strike a compromise and combine both approaches. I present an overview, a "big picture" of identification considerations and then provide examples, using those mushrooms that are distinctive and easy to recognize.

Mushroom identification is a multifaceted puzzle and the process of elimination of possibilities is very helpful. So, to start eliminating, here are some of the big picture considerations.

Is your mushroom fleshy or woody? There's a large group of mushrooms that are hard and woody, commonly called "conks," the Polypores. Though there are exceptions, most Polypores are hard and woody, often perennial with annual growth rings, and thus easy to distinguish from the myriad of fleshy mushrooms.

Does your mushroom have gills, spines, or pores? Walking along the woodland trail you can be fooled by the appearance from above of many mushrooms. But a quick glance at the underside of the cap reveals the presence of either gills, spines, or pores (the Boletes). With this quick observation you can quickly start to home in on the appropriate grouping of mushrooms. There are other large and distinctive groups of mushrooms that are good for the beginner to learn. Some of the most distinctive are the morels and false morels, the puffballs, the cup mushrooms, jelly mushrooms, and the corals and club mushrooms.

What time of the year is it? Like fruits and vegetables, many fungi fruit at a specific season. For example, morels appear in the spring. If it's the end of September and you're puzzled by that convoluted pinecone-like mushroom that you've found, you're likely looking at something other than a morel. Other mushrooms, such as the Winter Oyster (*Sarcomyxa serotina*) or the Winter Chanterelle (*Craterellus tubaeformis*), as their names suggest, appear late in the season. We don't expect to see them in May. Sometimes, when trying to figure out what you've found, you can narrow your search by simply noting the mushroom's fruiting season.

Where are you located geographically? Use a field guide that's as specific to your area as possible. Some field guides cover too broad a range, some as much as all of North America. If you have one of these it'll be loaded with species that do not grow in your area, thus adding to the confusion. Worse yet for the beginner are those field guides written for European fungi, translated into English, and again loaded with fungi that do not grow here. (These guides are still useful for more experienced people, who have a grasp of the different genera. A few recommended guides are listed at the end of this article.)

Where are you collecting and what is the substrate or type of ground from which you've picked your collection? Mushrooms can be very specific as to where they'll grow. Some grow on the ground, some on wood. Some like to grow in grass, some on dung, while some grow specifically on fir cones. One species, *Agaricus bitorquis*, prefers disturbed, hard packed soil. It can often be seen emerging along the edge of sidewalks or even through asphalt. Walking along the street and seeing it from a distance, you can make a quick identification simply from this growth habit. Some have a symbiotic (mycorrhizal) relationship with specific trees. For example, many in the genus *Suillus* grow exclusively with pines, others only with Lodgepole pine. Some *Suillus* grow only with Larch, such as *Suillus ampliporus*. By closely observing where your mushroom is growing you can quickly eliminate a lot of confusing possibilities and narrow your search.

What are the weather conditions? Considering them can eliminate more possibilities. If it has been hot and dry, mushrooms on the ground may be few and far between. However, "the wood rotters" may be fruiting because those mushrooms are saprotrophic, growing on and breaking down the tissue in fallen trees, and taking advantage of the moisture contained in the wood fibers. A nice example of this is *Aureoboletus mirabilis*, the Admirable Bolete, one of

the very few boletes that grows on wood (usually, specifically, Douglas Fir). By knowing its growth habit on wood, combined with its distinctive brown velvety top, you can make a quick and accurate identification.

What is the growth habit of your mushroom? Most mushrooms are predictable and distinctive in how they grow. Is it growing singly, in groups, or in dense clusters? Observing this growth habit can be very useful at times. For example, you would be hard pressed in the field to tell the difference between *Gomphidius glutinosus* (“hideous” *Gomphidius*) and *Gomphidius oregonensis*, except that *G. oregonensis* is the one that grows in clusters. A popular edible is the “Fried Chicken” mushroom, *Lyophyllum decastes*, often growing in large dense clumps in disturbed soil. Knowing this you shouldn’t get confused with the toxic *Entolomas* that look similar but don’t grow in the large “cespitose” groups, but singly or two or three together. A quick glance at these easy to distinguish features will again quickly eliminate confusing possibilities and narrow down your search.

These are some of the broad strokes of initial identification. The next step in identification is to start looking at specific details of the mushroom. Here you’ll be examining a variety of mushroom characteristics such as colour, texture, size, shape, spore print colour, gill attachment, veils, and many other traits. These can all assist with identification. However, this detailed stage can be a long and slow process of meticulous and lengthy investigative work; after 45 years there are still many species I am learning to identify.

It’s encouraging and fun for beginners to learn some of the easily identified species in your area, especially if you’re looking for edibles. The morels are relatively easy, as are the chanterelles with their funnel shape, white or yellow colour, and blunted vein-like gills. Lobster mushrooms are hard to confuse with anything else. Also distinctive are the Shaggy Manes and Puffballs. The Boletes can be a good area for beginners to focus on, because they are fewer in number than the gilled mushrooms. So, too, are the mushrooms with spines. There aren’t that many of them, and two related species, the “Hedgehogs” (*Hydnum repandum* and *Hydnum umbilicatum*) are excellent edibles and conveniently distinctive. Another good beginner’s genus to investigate is *Lactarius*, with its distinctive coloured milk (latex) and associated colour changes.

Mushroom identification is an unlimited pursuit; there are thousands of species out there. With often years between fruitings, their identification can be a challenge. However, if you like puzzling things out, you’ll never be bored. And for those who just want to know “can I eat it?” there are lots of quick and easily identified mushrooms to be found.

Recommended Field Guides and other resources:

- **Mushrooms of British Columbia** by Andy Mackinnon and Kem Luther
- **Mushrooms of the Pacific Northwest** by Steve Trudell (there’s a revised and updated edition coming this fall)
- **Mushrooms of the Northwest** by Drew Parker and Teresa Marrone
- Southern Vancouver Island Mycological Society (SVIMS) website, along with the website [mycomatch.com](http://mycomatch.com)



A ‘gilled’ mushroom *Hygrophorus agathosmus* left and a ‘bolete’ *Suillus ochraceoroseus* with pores right. Photo Credit: Peter Courtney



A woody 'conk' *Fomitopsis orchraceous* left compared with a fleshy 'jelly' *Guepinia helvelloides* right. Photo Credit: Peter Courtney



Easy to identify edibles Shaggy Mane *Coprinus comatus* left and Hedgehog *Hydnum repandum* right  
Photo Credit: Peter Courtney

## THE WESTERN PAINTED TURTLE (*CHRYSEMYS PICTA*)

SOURCED BY LISA RAE



Photo Credit - Bruce Kennedy

The Western Painted Turtle is the most widely distributed of the 49 turtle species in North America; southern BC represents the northern limit of its range. The Western Painted Turtle is the only native freshwater turtle in British Columbia. The Red-eared Slider turtle, an invasive species, may also be seen in the same habitat as the Western Painted Turtle. Introduced by humans through the pet trade, the Red-eared Slider is a source of disease and competes for habitat and food with the native Western Painted Turtle. Red-eared Sliders have a distinct, red-coloured patch behind the eye, but this colour diminishes with age. If you see a Red-eared Slider, the Ministry asks that it is reported: <https://bcinvasives.ca/invasives/red-eared-slider/>

The Western Painted Turtle requires wetlands for hiding and foraging, as well as upland dryer areas with sandy or gravelly soils that are suitable for nesting. Quality habitat has been greatly reduced due to the draining of wetlands and destruction of upland drier slopes. Additional threats include road traffic, human disturbance of nests and illegal capture. These human factors compound the threats associated with natural enemies such as coyotes, skunks, badgers, and ground squirrels, which predate mainly on hatchlings. For all these reasons, the Western Painted Turtle is considered a Species At Risk in British Columbia.

Adult male Western Painted Turtles have a plastron (underside bony shell) length of 9 to 17 cm; females are larger and can have plastrons up to 22 cm long. Males weigh 800 grams at most, but females are distinctly larger and may reach 1400 grams. Western Painted Turtles are well named, as both males and females have a range of striking

colours which include a greenish back, yellow stripes on the head, neck, tail and legs, and irregularly shaped, bright red markings around the edges of the plastron and under the rim of the carapace (upper boney shell).

According to one source, in southern BC, female Western Painted Turtles reach sexual maturity at 12-15 years and males reach maturity between 7-10 years. This reproductive pattern, in combination with the other factors mentioned, further endangers species survivability. From early June to early July, females lay clutches of about 6 to 18 leathery eggs in light, dry soils. The temperature of the nest determines the gender. Eggs incubate for 70 to 80 days and hatch in late August or early September. In BC, most hatchlings stay in the nest until May or June of the following year, at which time they emerge. The Western Painted Turtle faces many threats as described (especially as a hatchling), but potentially has a lifespan of 30 - 50 years.



Photo Credit - Bruce Kennedy

In winter, adult turtles hibernate in shallow waters on top of mud near the shore, and become active when the spring water temperature reaches 10°C. Their diet includes aquatic plants, freshwater insects and larvae, amphibians, and dead animal matter. Interestingly, young turtles tend to be carnivorous and become more herbivorous with age. As we see on sunny days, they tend to forage for food in the morning, then bask in the sun on semi-submerged logs and rocks.

We can help to improve survival rates of the Western Painted Turtle by not disturbing aquatic areas or nesting slopes, establishing signage at turtle crossings, and supporting projects that retain or restore wetlands.

*Sources:*

*Wildlife Branch Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks, Victoria, B.C., 1998*

*B.C. Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change Strategy and Thompson Rivers University, 2022*

