

Central Okanagan Naturalist

www.okanagannature.org

June , 2025



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*Know Nature and Keep it
Worth Knowing*

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Monthly Meetings: 2nd Tuesday of the month.

June Picnic, June 10, 4 p.m. – see below

WELCOME NEW CONC MEMBERS!

Our club is growing and thriving, and we welcome our newest members. We look forward to meeting you in the natural world.

- Kalin Ocaña
- Linda Jerome
- Anna McIndoe
- Cathy Shepherd
- Charles Lund
- George Coulter
- Cathy Shepherd
- Kimberley Archibald
- Doug Jerome
- Anita Lawry
- Darryl Bakken
- Viven Wu
- Khang Tong
- C. Kari Bredahl
- Isis Khalil
- Gwen Steele
- Karen Motzkus
- Myrl Coulter
- Darryl Bakken
- Karen Motzkus

UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

CONC JUNE PICNIC

BY ROBBIE BOWERS



The June annual potluck picnic will be held on Tuesday, June 10th, at 4:00 pm, at Kinsmen Park on Abbott Street. Our tables will be set up near the washrooms on the southwest side of the park. This should allow for free parking and easy access - members can drop off their chairs, food, etc. and then go and park on a side street.

We hope for great weather and a great turnout!

A reminder email will be sent closer to the date.



!!DATE CHANGE - Saturday June 7!!



Annually, members of the Central Okanagan Naturalists' Club conduct a survey of the Johns Family Nature Conservancy Regional Park for the property trustees, the Central Okanagan Land Trust (COLT). This annual survey covers avifauna, mammals and reptiles, like the survey that is carried out for the adjacent Okanagan Mountain Park. Since 2022, participants have been invited to also capture photos of flowering plants and any unusual insects encountered during the survey. These photographs were subsequently submitted to

iNaturalist as a record of species occurrences on the Johns Family property. The results of the overall survey 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 2025 survey will cover both the public and ecological sections of the Johns Family property, requiring six or seven teams with an interest in the natural environment. The survey is scheduled for **Saturday, June 7**, 8 a.m. until approximately noon and will follow the CONC group activity protocols. The organisers (Eve Wegscheidler, the Park Trustee and Mike Howard) hope that by holding the survey on a weekend, this will allow additional CONC members to participate.

If you would like to participate in the 2025 survey, please notify Eve Wegscheidler at ewegscheidler@gmail.com, indicating your area of interest (avifauna, mammals, reptiles, insects, or plants), and you will be assigned to one of the study area teams.

OUR CONC BOARD NEEDS YOU!

BY ANNETTE HATHAWAY AND GLENDA NEWMAN



As most of you are aware, we have been without a President and Vice President for some time now. Many of the current Board members have been so kind as to step up to the plate on some of those positions' duties, and we want to thank them! However, we are aware that this is not a workable situation in the long run. Hence, our call to you to consider coming forward to volunteer or to canvass those you know, if they would like to join our board. Some of our current CONC Board members are also ready to retire, so there will be a variety of positions to choose from. And yes...there is an opportunity to be creative!! For example, you could share a position with a friend. Another possibility could be seeking out and forming a committee as part of your position for task sharing.

Board meetings are held monthly and are usually on Zoom, with a few in-person meetings planned. If you would like to get a taste of what a board meeting is about, we would welcome you to sit in and observe, using the Zoom link provided with the Board Agenda before each meeting.

We know that this is an undertaking that requires some thought and research, so please feel free to contact any board member if you would like to learn more about a particular position. All current Board members have an email address attached to their position, listed on the last page of this newsletter. All Board positions are open to be filled at the AGM, as per CONC bylaws, but the positions most likely to be open at our next AGM are President, Vice President, Birding, Botany, Communications & Outreach and Outings. We would be happy to answer questions about the skills needed or the time involved in these roles.

Thank you for your support!

REGULAR COLUMNS

BIRDING REPORT

BY MIKE HOWARD

During the first five months of 2025, members were able to participate in 42 CONC-organised birding excursions. This included:

- 19 Monday outings
- 19 Thursday outings
- 3 Saturday outings including a trip to Douglas Lake (during Sandhill Crane migration)
- The Rick Howie Interior BC Swan and Eagle Annual Count (January 2025)

THE RICK HOWIE INTERIOR BC SWAN AND EAGLE ANNUAL COUNT (JANUARY 16, 2025)

Twenty-two volunteers contributed to this count. Of note, we had one adult Golden Eagle in this year's count, along with 70 Bald Eagles (18 of which had not reached adulthood). Only two immature swans (one Trumpeter and one Tundra) were identified among the 28 swans (21 Trumpeter and seven Tundra) identified in the Kelowna area.

On these 2025 outings to date, we observed 133 avifauna species and submitted 98 eBird checklists, bringing our total number of checklists submitted by the "CONC Birding Group" to 665.

2025 outings are possible thanks to all the birding excursion leaders who select a location, lead the excursion, and then report the results of the outing. Our thanks to Annette Lachaine, Archie MacDonald, Bruce Kennedy, Carol Sharplin, Deborah White, Don Wilson, Douglas Graham, Fran Fisher, Gillian Fyles, Gwynneth Wilson, Ian Walker, Jasmine Korkok, Julia Proulx, Joyce Fraser, Karen Blumel, Lisa Rae, Margaret Bryan, Mike Howard, Pam Laing, Rick Gee, Sharon Taylor, Simon Pethick, Steffany Walker, Vivian Manning and Wendy Wright.

Several of our very talented photographers have added photographs of the birds we observed for the benefit of our members and as evidence to eBird in our role as citizen scientists. Our contributing photographers included Bruce Kennedy, Douglas Graham, Ian Walker, Julia Proulx, Karen Blumel, Linda Walker, Lisa Rae, Pam Laing and Vivian Manning. A special thanks to Gillian Fyles and Sharon Taylor, who have recorded the majority of our eBird checklists this year.



Red-naped Sapsucker photo courtesy of Julia Proulx



Yellow-rumped warbler (Audubon's group) photo courtesy of Vivian Manning



Immature Bald Eagle photo courtesy of Douglas Graham



Male and female Mountain Bluebird photos courtesy of Bruce Kennedy



Sandhill Cranes photo courtesy of Bruce Kennedy

THOMSON MARSH VIEWING PLATFORM PROJECT - PROJECT PROGRESS TO MAY 14, 2025

The Executive Committee struck a special projects committee to undertake the Thomson Marsh Viewing Platform (TMVP) Project. The project is being undertaken with thanks to the efforts of the CONC TMVP Project Team (Archie MacDonald, Bruce Kennedy, Douglas Graham, Les Gyug, Vivian Manning, Lisa Rae, Roy Sinden, Wayne Wilson from COLT and Mike Howard) as well as Riparian Rehabilitation volunteers Sabine Gyug, Simon Pethick, Jen Matthews and Fred Bowes.

The project was 95% completed with riparian planting around the platform in mid-April 2025, at which time the City removed the security fencing, allowing the public to use this facility.



On April 13, 2025, Les Gyug and his team of volunteers placed the top coating of mulch, which completed the riparian planting around the platform (photos courtesy of Les).

A few items are remaining before we can hold an official opening and thank the various participants, including:

- **Platform Display Panels**
Lisa Rae, Vivian Manning, and Bruce Kennedy completed a resubmission of the display panel photos to meet the City's revised sizing requirements on April 15, 2025. The City has provided a final markup of the display panels, now reviewed by Lisa, Vivian and Bruce, before going to fabrication and installation.
- **Commemorative plaque**
Content for the commemorative plaque was provided to the City on February 6, 2025, for approval and production.
- **TMVP Inauguration**
CONC will work with the City to plan a simple inauguration of the project when the display panels have been installed. The FAQ document prepared by CONC was approved for distribution by the City on April 23, 2025.
- **City Outstanding Work Items**
Produce and install the display and commemorative panels, and place a concrete pad at the base of the entrance staircase and access path connecting the entrance stairs to the adjacent trail(s).

Here are some updates on what our committee has been up to and some information to keep you informed on some conservation issues in town.

Our current priorities:

1. STOPPING THE CLEMENT AVENUE EXTENSION

What we've done:

- Wrote a letter to the Minister of Transportation, Mayor and Council to request a meeting
- Helped to plan the June 1st Rail trail celebration
- Met with 1 councillor so far
- Encouraged other clubs and organizations to write to the City and request meetings

What club members can do:

- Get informed, by reading last summer's [Council Report](#) about the proposed road
- Write a letter to the council about what the rail trail means to you, and why you are against the construction of this road. ([Mayor and Councillors' emails here](#))
- Attend the June 1st event mentioned on the [Save the Rail Trail Green Space page](#)

2. MITIGATING DAMAGES FOR THE BURTCH ROAD EXTENSION

What we've done:

- Wrote a letter encouraging the project be abandoned (October last year)
- Partnered with the City to the best of our ability to mitigate damages once the City made it clear that the road was going through
- Attended 3 meetings with the City and construction crew in which we advocated for:
 - Extending the buffer of native trees and shrubs around Munson Pond and widening the buffer North of Fascieux Creek.
 - Restoring the weedy field north-west of Munson Pond (where Burtch currently dead ends), by planting native grasses, hawthorn, roses and milkweed.
 - Planting of native shrubs, grasses and milkweed where the buffer of trees ends in the field West of Munson Pond.
 - Ensuring that the streetlights point downwards to prevent light pollution.
 - Planting non-attractive vegetation along the roadway to prevent raptor and other wildlife strikes.
 - Installing underpass culverts for mammals, reptiles and amphibians.

What club members can do:

- I do not know how much more can be done on this issue, and believe that attention should be focussed on other areas.
- If you feel inclined to continue emailing the city about this issue, the appropriate contacts are: <https://www.kelowna.ca/city-hall/council/our-council>.

3. IMPROVING TRUSWELL PARK

What we've done:

- Meetings with Stephan Johansen since fall 2023, helping to steer the direction of this park towards a nature preserve. Recently some members of the CONC board and other interested parties met with him. We agreed to three immediate priorities for the park:
 - Improving the signage to educate visitors about the importance of this habitat for migratory birds, including drafting signage to present to the City of Kelowna
 - Planting native trees and bushes for migratory songbirds to rest and refuel, as well as eventually create some good nesting habitat
 - Keeping bylaw signage about dogs being kept on leash

What club members can do:

- When you see dog owners breaking the rules at Truswell Park, please consider respectfully reminding them that this is now a City Park with rules in place to preserve this habitat for shorebirds.

4. PROTECTING THE HEADWATERS OF MISSION CREEK

What we've done: (Still in the early stages)

- Met with FOMC (Friends of Mission Creek) President David Taylor and Don Knox to see what efforts FOMC and MCRI have made in the past
- Contacted IWTF (Interior Watershed Task Force), to see what measures they suggest taking to accomplish protection
- Plan to attend their monthly meetings

What club members can do:

- If anyone in our club is knowledgeable on this issue or has some information on this issue, or has a connection to City Councillors, MLA's or MPs in the valley, we would love to meet with them.

BOTANY REPORT

BY PETER COURTNEY



Photo by Jen Matthews

CONC's botany season began in April with two outings to see early bloomers at Okanagan Mountain and Jackpine Meadows. The regular Friday botany outings began on May 2, focusing as always on flowering plants, and will continue until July 18. This is the period of peak flowering, when there's lots to see. The schedule, including outing locations, can be found on [CONC's homepage](#).

At the time this article was submitted, five botany outings had been completed. In addition to plants, participants observed birds, insects, mushrooms and anything else of interest. A checklist and field guide are used to assist with identification in the field, and a final list of what was seen at each outing is sent to the participants after the outing.

The first outing was to Okanagan Mountain Park to see early blooming Scalegod *Idaho scapigera* and a dozen other species, as well as several fruiting mosses. Pictures taken by the group can be viewed at: [OMP Observations · iNaturalist](#).

With some snow still on the ground, the second outing to Jackpine Meadows focused on the flowering of Steer's Head *Dicentra uniflora*. This tiny member of the Poppy family is not rare but is seldom seen because of its inconspicuous nature, early flowering, and very short aboveground life of 2-3 weeks. Pictures taken by the group can be viewed at: [Jackpine Observations · iNaturalist](#).

For the third outing on May 2, to Beaver Lake Road, our group made three stops along the lower part of the road and saw 57 species in bloom (or with fresh seeds). The group observed spectacular vistas of flowering Arrowroot Balsamroot, a large bloom of Skunk Cabbage, and several species from each of the mustard and violet families. Pictures taken can be viewed at: [Beaver Lake Observations · iNaturalist](#).

On the fourth outing to Knox Mountain Park on May 9, we saw 65 species, including 10 grass, 13 aster, and 8 mustard species and lots of Bitterroot in bloom. We saw plants relatively unique to this site, including Freckled Milk-Vetch, Western Blue Flax, Linear-leaved Daisy, and Plains Mustard. Pictures taken can be viewed at: [Knox Observations · iNaturalist](#).

For the fifth outing on May 16, to the lower portion of Scenic Canyon, we saw 94 species, including two species of orchid and representatives from 37 other plant families. This time we also found seven species of mushrooms. Pictures taken can be viewed at [Scenic Observations · iNaturalist](#).

To see what's flowering in our area, check out iNaturalist projects such as the [Mission Creek Greenway Biodiversity Project](#) and the [Okanagan Biodiversity Project](#).

We encourage members to volunteer to lead botany outings. You don't have to be a botany geek to lead, but a familiarity with some of our native plants and a knowledge of the field guide we use would be helpful. In the end, it's a chance to get out and see and photograph some beautiful flowering plants and to put names to a few of them. Plant lists will be provided to assist you.

Regarding botany field guides and helpful references, I recommend *Plants of the Southern Interior of British Columbia*, Lone Pine Press. The best online resource for BC plants is *eFlora* <https://ibis.geog.ubc.ca/biodiversity/eflora/>. An excellent FREE cell phone/tablet app is *British Columbia Wildflowers*, available for both Android and iPhone/iPad. [iNaturalist](#) and [Seek](#) are popular cell phone apps for identifying plants from photos.

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

OUTINGS REPORT

BY GLENDA NEWMAN

Our groups have been busy with hikes Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and biking Friday. We've hiked several places in the Okanagan, from Mount Keogan by Okanagan Falls to the BX trails and Kalamalka Park in Vernon. Biking has mostly been along the rail trails and exploring Kelowna's biking corridors.



FEATURES

CONC IN THE NEWS - BIRDING LEADER INTERVIEW

DOUGLAS GRAHAM

Looking after our feathered friends

CONC's Birding Director, Mike Howard, recently was featured in a local media article with timely advice about bluebird boxes, hummingbird feeders, and bird feeders. Check out [Kelowna Now](#) for the article and for some photos of Mike and of his famous bluebird boxes. We're always grateful to see some good publicity for CONC.

SPRING CLEAN-UP 2025

BY ROBBIE BOWERS



CONC works with the City of Kelowna to help keep streams and adjacent property clear of litter. Douglas Graham led a team of ten at Thomson Marsh collecting garbage, and Robbie Bowers worked at the Maude Roxby wetlands. Sixteen members spent two hours at the Bulman Rd/UBCO overpass and Rail Trail near Mill Creek collecting numerous bags of garbage and several large objects, including bicycle parts!

A big thank you to our numerous volunteers for a very successful cleanup!

BLACK MOUNTAIN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL BIRDING PROJECT, 2025

BY PAM LAING

Spring 2025 has seen the eighth year of a project to introduce the Grade Three classes at Black Mountain Elementary School to the joys of birding. We began with a PowerPoint presentation of the most often seen species we might encounter, then followed up with an hour's birding walk with each class. Meanwhile, the teachers covered some important preparatory material such as conservation, habitat, migration and how to use the school board's small binoculars. Since the school backs onto the Gopher Creek trail, pond and wetland, our walk usually produces a tally of approximately 20 species. Notable sightings this year were two Red-tailed Hawks and a Sharp-shinned Hawk seen by one class, and a Merlin and a Rufous Hummingbird seen by the other. Both classes were delighted to see Turkey Vultures as well. Since I will not be taking part in this project in future, I gave the teachers my PowerPoint talk and notes so that they can carry on if they choose. Perhaps another CONC member might be willing to help accompany them for their outings if they ask? It's been a fun and rewarding association for the past eight years, and I will miss it.

REPORT ON THE 2025 BIRDATHON

BY PAM LAING

The weather was a challenge for the 2025 Birdathon on Sunday, May 18th. Although not as varied as in 2023, we nonetheless battled cool temperatures and a strong onshore wind, which kept the birds hunkered down or sheltering on the west side of Okanagan Lake.

We began at 5:20 a.m. at Robert Lake, North Glenmore, with a good start of 28 species within half an hour. From there, our route took us to many of the city's known "hot spots" such as Thomson Marsh, Munson Pond, the mouth of Mission Creek, south Lakeshore Road and McCulloch Road. We kept our route within the Kelowna Christmas Bird Count Circle to reduce our mileage, and Gwynneth kept us strictly on time to maximise our return in the 8 hours we had. We tallied a respectable 90 species, which we felt was good considering the weather. Highlights were a Black-necked Stilt at Robert Lake, newly returned Blue-winged Teal at Thomson, Northern Waterthrush and Least Flycatcher on Mission Creek Greenway, Gray Catbird at Munson Pond, Pacific Wren on upper McCulloch Road and our final bird, Olive-sided Flycatcher.

Thank you to all who have sponsored the Birdathon again. We greatly appreciate all donations. If you still plan to donate, please do so before the end of May by using the link recently sent out to all CONC members (ask me if it has gone missing) or if you prefer, send me a personal e-transfer to pamlaing2309@gmail.com In early June I will

be sending one cheque for all the cash, cheques and e-transfers 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 2025, 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. On behalf of this year's team (Wilson's Warblers), Gwynneth Wilson (leader), Joyce Fraser, Annette Lachaine, Lesley Robertson, Carol Sharplin and I, thank you all.

OBSCURATA

BY IAN WALKER

2. WITCHES' BROOMS & DWARF-MISTLETOE

This is my second sojourn into the obscure. In the last newsletter, I discussed fungi as broom-causing agents. I thought about including Dwarf-Mistletoe in that article, but that seemed too long.

As noted last time, witches' brooms are often caused by Dwarf-Mistletoes, rather than by fungi. Dwarf-Mistletoes (*Arceuthobium* species) are vascular plants, but like the broom rusts, they are parasitic and depend on a host tree to survive.

In May 1978, I saw my first Dwarf-Mistletoe. It was at Fundy National Park in southern New Brunswick. I had been hired by Parks Canada as a Park Interpreter for the summer, and we were on an orientation walk, learning about interesting things to show park visitors along the Caribou Plain boardwalk. That boardwalk crossed a bog, and on a stunted Black Spruce on the eastern margin of the bog, we were shown some tiny, spruce-needle-sized parasitic plants, Eastern Dwarf-Mistletoe (*Arceuthobium pusillum*).

More recently, I discovered the same species growing on White Spruce at Overhanging Point in Bruce Peninsula National Park. It was still early spring, and much of Lake Huron's shore was still caked in ice. Essentially every other plant remained in a deep winter slumber, but the minuscule Dwarf-Mistletoes were in full bloom! It impressed me that these tiny plants must be both Ontario's earliest and most obscure wildflower!!!



Douglas-Fir Dwarf-Mistletoe in bloom at Bertram Creek Regional Park, 6 Mar 2025 (*upper left*); Witches' Broom caused by Douglas-Fir Dwarf-Mistletoe, on Gladstone Trail, Peachland, 2 Oct 2024 (*upper right*); Lodgepole Pine Dwarf-Mistletoe on Snowy Beauty Snowshoe Trail at Kelowna Nordic, 23 Feb 2025 (*lower left*); Hemlock Dwarf-Mistletoe in Stanley Park, 4 Sept 2016 (*lower right*).

Eastern Canada only has one Dwarf-Mistletoe species. Exactly how many species occur in British Columbia is a matter of debate; it depends, in part, on whether you accept the taxonomy presented in the Flora of North America (3 species) or Kew's Plants of the World (4 species). In addition, there are some subspecies recognized, once again, differing by source. Given the differing taxonomies, it is easier to speak of "kinds" rather than species and subspecies. I've identified two kinds (Lodgepole Pine Dwarf-Mistletoe & Douglas-Fir Dwarf-Mistletoe) in the Okanagan, and a third kind (Hemlock Dwarf-Mistletoe) in Stanley Park. I'm still looking for Larch, Mountain Hemlock and Shore-Pine Dwarf-Mistletoes. The Larch, Hemlock, Mountain Hemlock and Shore-Pine Dwarf-Mistletoes are sometimes considered separate species or subspecies; sometimes they are treated as subspecies or forms of Western Dwarf-Mistletoe. That confusion is why I prefer just to call them "kinds".

In each case, these Dwarf-Mistletoes are only partly visible to our eyes; much of each plant is actually growing deep inside the twigs, branches, and sometimes trunks of the host conifer. The visible portion may range from 1 cm to several cm in size. In the case of Douglas-fir Dwarf-Mistletoe, the visible portion is only slightly larger than a Douglas-Fir needle.

Different species bloom at different times of the year, and there are separate male and female plants. The blooms are tiny, less than 3.5 mm in diameter. There seems to be some controversy regarding their pollination – some suggest that wind carries the pollen among plants; others suggest insects are involved. More research is needed; maybe both methods of pollination are used.

Regardless, somehow, the pollen from male flowers must be transferred to the female flowers for these to be fertilized. Once fertilized, each flower starts to produce a tiny fruit containing only one seed and a very sticky substance, viscin.

The fleshy fruits of most plants (those other than Dwarf-Mistletoe) are consumed by animals, and the seeds readily survive passage through the animal's gut. Via this mechanism, seeds may be dispersed to places very distant from the parental plant.

Dwarf-Mistletoes, however, are different. Dwarf-Mistletoes have evolved a mechanism to literally fire the viscin-coated seeds through the air:

"The fruit literally explodes like a cannon, shooting its seed at an initial velocity of 97 km/hr (60 mph) 10 meters or so, up to a maximum of 16 m. You don't want to be taking a close look at it when that happens!" (<https://forestpathology.org/parasitic-plants/dwarf-mistletoe/>)

Inevitably, many of these seeds will miss their target, but in a dense conifer stand, some will land on a suitable host tree. The sticky substance coating the seeds, viscin, allows the seeds to cling to their host. As the viscin dries, each seed will start to grow, penetrating into the tissues of the host conifer, ultimately yielding a new plant, and thus a new infection. Dwarf-Mistletoes contain chlorophyll, so they are capable of some photosynthesis, but probably not enough to sustain themselves. Their leaves are reduced to mere scales. As a consequence, they are considered "hemi-parasites" (partial parasites). They are entirely dependent on their host trees for a supply of both water and nutrients.

As the names imply, each kind of Dwarf-Mistletoe primarily infects a different conifer (and these are not the same conifers commonly infected by broom rusts). So, once again, the easy first step to identifying these broom-causing agents: —> identify the tree they're growing on!

Dwarf-Mistletoes of British Columbia			
Common Name	Principal Host	Flora of North America	Kew's Plants of the World
Douglas-Fir Dwarf- Mistletoe	Douglas-Fir	<i>Arceuthobium douglasii</i>	<i>Arceuthobium douglasii</i>
Lodgepole Pine Dwarf-Mistletoe	Lodgepole Pine	<i>Arceuthobium americanum</i>	<i>Arceuthobium americanum</i>

Larch Dwarf-Mistletoe	Western Larch	<i>Arceuthobium campylopodum</i> ssp. <i>laricis</i>	<i>Arceuthobium campylopodum</i> ssp. <i>laricis</i>
Mountain Hemlock Dwarf-Mistletoe	Mountain Hemlock	<i>Arceuthobium campylopodum</i> ssp. <i>laricis</i>	<i>Arceuthobium tsugense</i> ssp. <i>mertensianae</i>
Hemlock Dwarf- Mistletoe	Western Hemlock	<i>Arceuthobium campylopodum</i> ssp. <i>tsugense</i>	<i>Arceuthobium tsugense</i> ssp. <i>tsugense</i>
Shore Pine Dwarf-Mistletoe	Shore Pine	<i>Arceuthobium campylopodum</i> ssp. <i>tsugense</i>	<i>Arceuthobium tsugense</i> ssp. <i>contortae</i>

Are they our earliest spring wildflowers? I'm not sure, but I think so. They are certainly our most obscure. This year, I found Douglas-Fir Dwarf-Mistletoe in bloom on March 6th in Bertram Creek Regional Park (north-facing slope); my first Sagebrush Buttercup bloom was March 2nd on Knox Mountain (south-facing slope). At higher elevations, the blooms occur later. On 13 May 2023, I scrambled through a snowy ditch at Idabel Lake to photograph the blooms of Lodgepole Pine Dwarf-Mistletoe.

If you want to see these diminutive plants, I can suggest a few places. Several Douglas-Fir in Bertram Creek Regional Park are infected. Look for Douglas-Fir with large witches' brooms. I've also found infected trees along Rimrock Road in Kelowna, and along the Gladstone Trail in Peachland. Several roadside Lodgepole Pine adjacent to Idabel Lake's public boat launch are also infected.

Now that I have a mental search image, I've trained myself to find them more readily.

MOSESSE—OFTEN OVERLOOKED

BY MITCH MILGRAM



From a botanical perspective, March can be a trying month. Spring is temptingly close, but for the most part, the woods are still sitting dormant, and spring buds and blossoms are still weeks away. However, amongst the greys and browns of the woods, the mosses that carpet the ground, rocks and logs have sprung to life and are putting on a lively green show. On a recent walk along the trails in one of my local parks, I focused on these plants, which tend to get ignored when more colourful and eye-catching plants are active.

Mosses are among the bryophyte group, along with liverworts and hornworts. They reproduce through spores, as do ferns and fungi. Unlike most other plants, they lack a vascular system for transporting water and nutrients throughout the plant. They lack true stems, roots and leaves. They rely instead on their ability to absorb moisture and nutrients through their contact with the air and soil around them, using their leaflike structures and rootlike structures called rhizoids. These rhizoids act like roots to aid in absorption and anchoring.

Trying to identify mosses is extremely challenging, hundreds of species require slow, exacting observation to tell them apart. Fortunately, a few relatively easily identified species occur in profusion. One of these is the “stair step moss”, *Hylocomium splendens*, that gets its name from the way the plant branches and laps over itself as it grows, not unlike shingles on a roof. Its feathery structure adds to its beauty. A second moss in abundance is *Hylocomiadelphus triquetrus*. It has a couple of colourful common names, sometimes called the “rough goose neck moss”, and at times “electrified cat’s tail moss”. Its dense, shaggy growth habit provides a protective groundcover over large portions of the forest floor.

A third moss, less plentiful than the previous two, is *Syntrichia ruralis*, the “star moss”. The photo, above, of this delicate moss illustrates how it gets its name.

A fourth and final common moss is *Dicranum scoparium*, the “Broom Fork moss”. Its delicate, wispy leaves generally bend off to one side

These four species are a small portion of the mosses that serve many beneficial roles. They’re natural sponges absorbing water, helping control runoff, maintaining soil stability and moderating soil temperature. They’re a pioneering species, often living on rocks where few things grow, breaking down material, making nutrients available, and creating habitat for other living things. They recycle nutrients and sequester carbon.

Although we’ll often only notice mosses when they’re encroaching on our lawns or slowly spreading across our roof shingles, they’re an important part of our natural environment and add a lively splash of colour in early spring when it’s most appreciated.

WINGS OVER THE ROCKIES NATURE FESTIVAL

BY RICK GEE AND JEN MATTHEWS



Most naturalists in the Okanagan know about the [Meadowlark Nature Festival](#), but do you know about the [Brant Wildlife Festival](#)? [Wings over the Rockies Nature Festival](#)? [Creston Valley Bird Festival](#)? This year, we decided to attend the Wings over the Rockies Nature Festival. This festival is held in the Upper Columbia Valley (Radium Hot Springs, Windermere, Fairmont Hot Springs) in early May; this year was the 28th version. It attracts naturalists (and others) from all over; we met Vancouverites, Vernonites, Edmontonians, Calgarians, Winnipeggers, and, yes, fellow Kelownians. Typically, there are several events each morning, several events each afternoon, and a few evening events each day of the seven days of the festival.

In 2025, the festival began on May 5. Our first event was on May 6, a visit to the Skookumchuck Prairie IBA (International Birding and Biodiversity Area). The first two stops of this driving tour focused on forestry and how current practices (particularly fire suppression) differed from the Indigenous ones, resulting in a loss of grasslands to the encroaching forests. Lots of Lewis’s Woodpeckers were in the forests. Once we reached the grasslands, we focused on the birds, particularly the Long-billed Curlew. After speaking about grasslands and finding no curlews, we packed up to leave. Of course, that was the moment when a curlew flew over.

Our second event was a paddle around Lake Lillian, near Invermere. The festival provided the boats; you provided the power to move them.

Our third event was a presentation by Steve Burrows, author of the Birder Murder mystery series (available from the Okanagan Regional Library, if you wish). Steve talked about the origin of the series and how each book followed from its predecessors.

Day two (May 7) began with a hike to the Dutch Creek Hoodoos. Flowers, birds, ungulates, and geology were the features of this event.

Event five was a walk through Dry Gulch Provincial Park, looking at the flowers that were in bloom. We were each given a picture of a flower and told to find it in the park while the group walked the roads. One participant, who shall remain nameless, was asked to find a Prairie Crocus; there was one right behind where we began the walk.

Day three (May 8) began with a walk along Sinclair Creek with the presentation focusing on what it took to restore fish to such a creek. The presenter provided a huge amount of information.

Event seven was the presentation of a movie called “[Wildflowers](#)”. It is not a botany film; it is a film about Mary Schäffer, an early traveller in the Rockies who was probably the second non-Indigenous person to see Maligne Lake. I found the presentation interesting as I hiked the route many years ago, and the trail is now being allowed to return to nature. You can read about this trip [here](#). Oh, the title: it’s a Schäffer quote: “Nature meant us all to be wildflowers, not house plants”.

May 9 (and events eight and nine) began with a birding trip to the Fairmont Meadows, along the Columbia River here approximately the size of Mission Creek, essentially in the village of Fairmont Hot Springs. Highlights included a Rufous Hummingbird, Lewis's Woodpeckers, and Red-naped Sapsuckers. An unidentified shorebird flew by so quickly that no one could identify it.

The day concluded with a walk through an area near our campground, which is being rehabilitated. Much of the forest has been removed by logging so it provided an interesting comparison to the Skookumchuck Prairie area, which was mainly managed by fire.

May 10 was a short day with only one event, the Wings Gala Celebration and Keynote presentation by Dr Rob Butler. His presentation was on developing a Mountain lifestyle, which could be used as a tourism draw. He spoke a lot about the Vancouver Bird Festival a few years ago; he implied the Wings Festival could grow, but some of the organizers seemed opposed to that idea.

Why such a short day? The festival is so popular that many events were sold out before we had a chance to purchase tickets. I actually wanted to buy a total of 29 tickets (only one of us is a boater), and we managed to get 23. But two of the events we could not purchase tickets for were both on May 10. To fill out the day, we soaked in the Radium Hot Springs for a while and then went for a hike.

The last day of the festival was May 11. We began the day with a birding trip led by Dr Butler. Like all good birders, he began at 7:30 in the morning, about half an hour from where we were staying. It was on a large piece of ranchland that a successful Calgary businessperson has purchased and is in the process of preserving. In the middle of the forest was a small pond containing several waterfowl. Lovely morning, the last of the good weather, actually.

For our final event, we visited a small family-owned apiary. A few of the bees were at home, but most were pollinating blueberries in the Fraser Valley. Of course we purchased a little honey to bring home. The apiarists suggested buying honey from apiarists you know are local, as much of the commercial honey includes Chinese (or other foreign) honey, which is from bees fed sugar rather than pollen and nectar from real flowers.

Then it was a long drive back, via Golden and Revelstoke. The plan had been to do this on May 12, but the weather was changing for the worse, so we came home a day early; heading west through the rain showers, we arrived in Kelowna after dark.

Conclusions: A very interesting festival, with a wide variety of presentations. Many people we saw have been coming back year after year. But be a little careful; the quality of the events can vary, and I don't know how to tell which are the better ones. Maybe in a couple of years we'll return.

ORCHARD MASON BEES

SOURCED BY LISA RAE



Mason bees have many distinctive features. They are solitary insects, completing their lifecycle on their own. They are shy and gentle in nature, and although they have a stinger, they do not show defensive behaviours. They are extremely effective pollinators given their abundance of body hair, high speed and high bloom visitation rate.

There are several Orchard Mason bee species (*Osmia* sp.) which are native to North America. *Osmia lignaria*, or the Blue Orchard Mason Bee, is found in our B.C. southern interior and coastal regions and will be described here.

The Orchard Mason Bee could be mistaken at first glance for a common house fly. It is a black/blue metallic colour, with females longer and more robust than the males. Males have longer antennae and a light tuft of hair at the front of the head. (Yes, it can be seen by eye!).

Orchard Mason bees live in woodlands and forest edges, appearing in early spring when the temperatures are consistently +10C or so, which usually coincides with the early flowering plants such as Oregon Grape and Cusick's Serviceberry. These bees do not have pollen sacs like honeybees; rather, the pollen is packed in rows of stiff hairs under the abdomen. Nectar is stored in the bee's crop. As an early Spring bee, they are more tolerant of cool temperatures and overcast skies than other bees, foraging in the early morning and late afternoon.

Their lifecycle is very brief, beginning with the males emerging in the early spring. They wait by the tubular hole until the females emerge, after which mating occurs. Sperm is stored in the spermatheca, and females can control the sex of their progeny. After mating, the males die, and the female begins her 20-day life of foraging, egg laying and cell construction. Using a suitable nest hole, she will deposit one egg, then collect sufficient pollen and nectar stores for this egg, which amounts to approximately 1,875 flower visits. She produces one or two eggs a day. The egg cell is then sealed with a mud plug, and the process repeats until the tube is full. The eggs in the back of the tube develop into females, while those at the front are males.

Larvae hatch a few days after being laid. They feed on the nectar and pollen stores for 10-14 days and then spin a cocoon. The pupa emerges and later in the summer will develop into an adult. The adult remains in the cell over the winter.

The Blue Orchard Mason bee has numerous parasites and predators (wasps, beetles, mites, birds, rodents and ants), and is susceptible to very cold or wet weather conditions.

If you cultivate Mason bees, you will likely find another solitary bee inhabiting the tubes, the Leafcutter Bee, *Megachile rotundata*. This very tiny bee constructs a compact tube of leaves with separate cells for the egg and pollen stores. Leafcutter bees are widely cultivated for crop pollination.

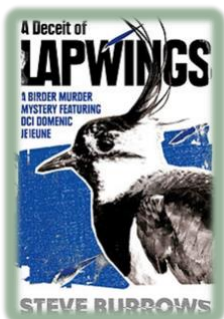
Sources

- [How to Manage the Blue Orchard Bee](#), J. Bosch and W.P. Kemp, 2001
- [B.C. Ministry of Agriculture](#)

BOOK REVIEW: BIRDER MURDER MYSTERY SERIES

BY RICK GEE

Simon and Schuster, Publisher, By Steve Burrows

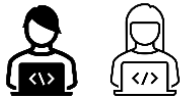


Not just a book, this is a series of nine books about a fictional Canadian detective named Dominic Jejeune, who is a birder. As the Okanagan Regional Library description of *A Siege of Bitterns*, the first in the series, says, "The problem is Jejeune doesn't really want to be a detective at all; he much prefers watching birds." Thus, you find that Domenic is a great detective, but he is always being diverted by the birds he sees. Most of the action takes place in England so you may learn something about English birds when you read these books.

If you're a fan of English detective stories or a fan of birds, you may enjoy the books in the series; the first eight are available through the Okanagan Regional Library. I'm waiting for the next one (published sometime this year)!

In order, the titles are:

- A Siege of Bitterns (2014)
- A Pitying of Doves (2015)
- A Cast of Falcons (2016)
- A Shimmer of Hummingbirds (2017)
- A Tiding of Magpies (2018)
- A Dance of Cranes (2019)
- A Foreboding of Petrels (2022)
- A Nye of Pheasants (2024)
- A Deceit of Lapwings (2025)



- Are you a user of eBird? [Big changes are on the way](#)....
- We are in an [age of extinction](#)
- Are you interesting in tracking the migration of birds in real time? These links are for you. Thanks to B. for the tip! <https://motus.org/> (Canada). And <https://birdcast.info/> (United States).
- The Western Sandpiper makes an important stop in its migration north, to feed on 'super mud'. [A fascinating west coast story](#).
- [Poop facts](#) – for the biologist in you...
- Ecological and ethical importance, yes, but there's also an economic value in old growth forests, if you consider [the long-term benefits of carbon sequestration and storage](#).
- [Gardening for biodiversity](#); this link contains many excellent topics. Thanks to J. for this one.
- We don't know until we know... [25 new species discovered this year](#).
- A Vancouver Island man, and his [videography of Anna's hummingbirds](#).
- How much do we need single use plastic? [Maybe not at all](#). Thanks to R. for this one.

IN MEMORIAM: CHRISTY ANDERSON

BY JUDY STEEVES

Passionate hiker and dedicated outdoors enthusiast Christy Anderson died at home in Denver, Colorado, of Mesothelioma Cancer on April 18 at the age of 76. Christy and her husband John Green, who predeceased her from cancer in 2019, were members of the Central Okanagan Naturalists' Club and hiked with the Sole Survivors from about 2006 until John's death.

Since John was Canadian, and lived in Kelowna and Christy was born in Los Angeles, California, the two spent their time together with feet planted firmly in both countries; summers hiking in the Okanagan and Rockies with us and winters in the desert of Southern California. Some CONC members hiked with them in both countries.

Christy led an active and generous life, teaching in the early 70s, then earning her law degree in 1977, and serving on several non-profit boards. After many successful years as an attorney, raising her two children through two marriages/relationships and embarking on a third, she fell in love with the Palm Springs area and met John while hiking in the desert with the Coachella Valley Hiking Club (CVHC).

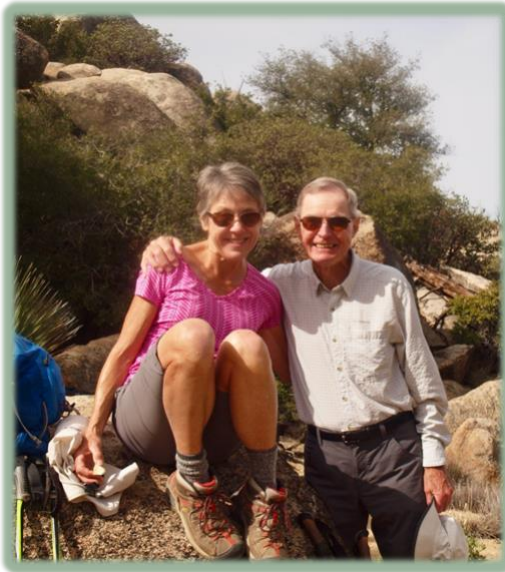
She later served on the CVHC executive for many years, including as president from 2012 to 2014. The [East Indio Badlands Hike](#), which she helped create and later named, was renamed the "Indio Badlands Christy Anderson Hike" this year in her honour.

She was diagnosed with Mesothelioma after she nursed John through prostate cancer and his death in their Indian Wells home. She later endured chemo and surgery, which depleted her energy and cut back her previously boundless energy for hiking the world.

Christy was thwarted in plans for a final visit with her CONC hiking friends by the 2023 MacDougall Creek wildfire when her hosts-to-be were evacuated, and airline travel to the Okanagan was discouraged. She cancelled her visit and was never able to return, due to deteriorating health.

In the last few years, she was brave and stoic in her world of pain from the cancer, but determined to walk, at least, every day and continue to visit with friends and family.

Her Okanagan friends were always in her heart, and she had wonderful memories of her time here. She reminded us all to "Enjoy the journey!"



Christy Anderson and her husband John Green, both former Sole Survivors, on a hike in the Coachella Valley in California.



[Mining Bee](#), Photo credit L.Rae

Nature does not hurry, yet everything is accomplished
- Lao Tzu



Central Okanagan Naturalists' Club www.okanagannature.org
P.O. Box 21128, RPO Orchard Park, Kelowna, B.C. V1Y 9N8
Email info@okanagannature.org for any general enquiry

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Conservation Director	Kailin Ocaña	conservation@okanagannature.org

Resource Persons

Host Committee	Bev Thomas	cymru@telus.net
Website	Rick Gee	admin@okanagannature.org

Club Information

MONTHLY MEETINGS

- 2nd Tuesday of the month, September to June, 7:00 p.m. at Evangel Church, 3261 Gordon Drive, Kelowna.
- Visitors are welcome.
- Host: Bev Thomas cymru@telus.net. Please bring your own cup.

MEMBERSHIP

- **ANNUAL DUES: Single \$45, Family \$60, Students \$15.** Includes the quarterly newsletter, sent by email. (**Additional \$20 annual charge for newsletters sent by regular mail**).
- **MEMBERSHIP FORM AND WAIVER:** Available on the CONC website. Please send your application, with waiver form and dues to: CONC Membership, Box 21128, Orchard Park P.O., Kelowna, B.C. V1Y 9N8, or electronically to membership@okanagannature.org.
- **DUES:** Dues may also be paid by e-transfer to 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
- **MEMORIAL MEMBERS:** Arthur Hughes-Games, Brenda Thomson, Muriel Westwood, Harry Almond, Cec Dillabough

NEWSLETTER

- Send submissions to editor@okanagannature.org
- Next deadline date for submissions is August 15, 2025
- Newsletter email distribution: Steffany Walker & Annette Lachaine: membership@okanagannature.org

ACTIVITIES

- All activities are seasonal. Weekend Explorers outings on the last weekend of each month – [check Calendar for details](#). Non-members are very welcome to join one or two CONC outings.
- All outing details are on our [website calendar](#). If in doubt check with the activity contact, or contact any Board Member.

BIRDING: contact birding@okanagannature.org

- **Monday Birding:** meet 7:45 a.m. (April-Sept.) or 8:45 a.m. (Oct-March) at the Robert Hobson parking lot*
- **Thursday Birding:** meet 7:45 a.m. (April-Sept.) or 8:45 a.m. (Oct-March) at the Robert Hobson parking lot*
- **Saturday Birding:** Day-long outings on second Saturdays, March to November, (except August recess) Osoyoos to Salmon Arm. Meet at the Robert Hobson parking lot* at 7:30 am to sign in for a 7:45 am start – return mid to late afternoon. Route details provided by email Thursday prior to outing. Carpooling is encouraged - rate paid to the driver is shown on the [Activities](#) page. Bring lunch / refreshments.

NOTE: TIMES SUBJECT TO CHANGE!

BOTANY: contact botany@okanagannature.org

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

HIKES and SHOWSHOEING: All hikers meet Robert Hobson parking lot* (Bring a lunch)

- **Tuesday: Ramblers** contact Robert Lake: 250-717-1029 wipguy@gmail.com
- **Wednesday: Sole Survivors** contact Glenda Newman outings@okanagannature.org
- **Thursday: Trail Trekkers** contact Brenda Johnson 250-808-8370 bubbaloo101@gmail.com
- **Thursday: Snowshoeing** contact Robert Lake 250-717-1029 wipguy@gmail.com

** East End of the Robert Hobson ECCO parking lot where Leckie Road meets Springfield Road*