

# The Kestrel

Quarterly Newsletter of the  
Rocky Mountain Naturalists  
2016 fall equinox



Stewart Wilson

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Can you find a good kestrel picture [our local species, the American Kestrel] for this spot? If so, please email it to the newsletter.

# Club Camp – Dry Gulch

June 17-19

Sixteen members of our club and one guest enjoyed a weekend in the Dry Gulch/Invermere area. We started out on Friday evening with a potluck at Dry Gulch Provincial Campground. One member unfortunately was unable to attend at the last minute, so we just took over that campsite for our gatherings. It worked really well, with lots of room for our stuff! There was no shortage of food as we visited and reviewed the next day's activities.



Greg Ross



birding on Zehnder Ranch

Ruth Goodwin

Saturday morning, some members started with 7am early morning birding around the campground. By 8 am we were sorting out drivers and vehicles as Randy Hopkins, a Fairmont member of our club, joined us to lead the day's activities. By 8:30 we were at the Zehnder Ranch, and all of us were very impressed with the beautiful setting, the mooing cows, and great birdwatching. John Zehnder, one of

the three sons of the original family, showed us around and was very keen to hear our bird talk. He stated that Wings Over the Rockies participants were not nearly as good at bird identification as our group. After three hours of meandering around, and some of us enjoying a Peregrine Falcon and Golden Eagle along with very cute Bufflehead ducklings, we headed over to Lillian Lake for lunch. Next it was to Munn Lake where Red-necked Grebe ducklings were hopping on and off the parent's back. Fascinating to watch! Grey Catbirds, Great Blue Heron, and an acrobatic Belted Kingfisher entertained us before we went to



old homestead at the ranch

Ruth Goodwin



Greg Ross

Wilmer Sloughs for more birding in the Columbia Wetlands. Some of us tried to test our botany skills but were not rewarded with much variety. The clovers and alfalfa were abundant along with

some composites. By the time we were heading to our vehicles to visit Kicking Horse Coffeehouse, the rain showers started. We were most fortunate with weather: not too hot, too wet, or too cold! Saturday evening we had a wiener roast back at Dry Gulch and enjoyed chatting and feasting at our fire!



Greg Ross

Sunday morning we gathered at the trailhead for the Old Coach Trail. Five of us biked the trail and nine of us were on foot. There are numerous single track trails heading off the main road so folks



Greg Ross

could meander as long as they wanted. White-throated Swifts above the cliffs were seen, and others enjoyed a variety of songbirds along the trail. The walking group had an incredible mating display by a male Calliope Hummingbird while the female sat attentively watching and waiting in a nearby tree. Out over the wetlands, we had a good view of a heron hunting for fish, two Bald Eagles in and out of their nest and a group of Common Mergansers. Unknown swans (either Tundra or Trumpeter) were seen in the distance. Greg recorded 34 species. We also had Common Loon, Turkey Vulture, Osprey, Spotted Sandpiper, and a Gray Catbird.

For the entire weekend Greg recorded 68 species at seven different locations. [A list is available at <http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S30332521>.] It was a great weekend of birding and visiting by the campfire. We think all the participants enjoyed the weekend and exploring some new areas!

submitted by your Club Camp organizers Ruth Goodwin and Jackie Leach

## Evening Paddle on St. Mary Lake

July 7

On July 7, 2016, six intrepid paddlers (others having bailed out) met on the shores of St. Mary Lake. A strong wind blowing down the cloud enshrouded valley was causing white caps and swells on the lake. While watching other people in their high speed boats making a beeline to the



shore, the dark clouds rolled in and the raindrops started to fall. After spotting numerous deer, a moose, mountain chickadees, dark-eyed juncos and a couple of osprey, we decided the safer course would be to retire to the Marysville Pub. A pleasant evening was had by all who attended.

story and photo by Paula Rogers

# Escarpment above the St. Mary River

July 16



On a sunny, clear sky day, 20 enthusiastic RM Nats began their journey through the wild flower laden meadows next to the Bootleg Gap Golf course. Wildflower books were brought into play as we tried to identify the numerous wild flowers growing along our route. Shortly we came upon what we call the escarpment, described as a long continuous steep face of a ridge or plateau formed by erosion. Spectacular views were had from the top of the escarpment to the St. Mary river valley far below us. An

abundance of tree, bank and cliff swallows, etc. darted in and around the unusually shaped hoodoos. Following the level pathway along the edge of the escarpment, we stopped for a brief rest and snack break at an old wooden bench. From this vantage point, we could spot an enormous eagle's nest down in the valley. Unfortunately, no eagles were spotted. A deep pine forest provided some welcome shade from the ever-warming sunshine. For me, one of the



highlights of this outing was spotting a lazuli bunting quite close to the trail. It seemed like he was putting on a show just for us. Our 2.5 hour loop route provided entertainment for birders and plant enthusiasts alike.

article by Paula Rogers  
photos by George Rogers

# Sheep Mountain

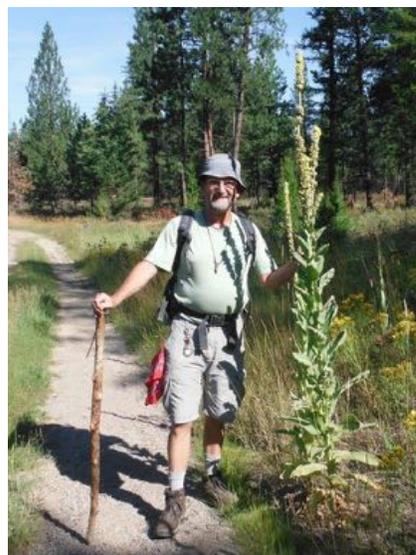
August 14

Well, it didn't turn out to be quite the "easy and simple" hike that Gerry had so earnestly promised, but it was a good Rocky Mtn. Naturalists hike just the same. The route as described in the 1998 edition of Janice Strong's *Mountain Footsteps* just doesn't seem to be there anymore, try as we did to find it. But after taking a rough gravel road a little further west than Janice indicated and hiking it

for about two hours, we got to a



Gerry Warner



Paula Rogers

microwave tower that was less than a kilometer from our destination. So yea! Gerry was able to wipe some of the egg from his face. And we did see a good variety of birds,

including a turkey vulture, nighthawk, Clark's nutcracker and others, and we saw some of the biggest Mullein we'd ever seen and a glorious display of purple asters and St. John's-wort. Next time Gerry will check out the trail head first before leading a hike, especially if he hasn't been on that particular trail for five or 10 years.



Gerry Warner

# Hourglass Lake

August 27

Nineteen members and four guests hiked up to Hourglass Lake August 27. The temperature was about 13 degrees when we started up the trail, and it was not much warmer by the time we returned to



the vehicles about four hours later. We had just a few sprinkles of rain. I only heard the Golden-crowned Kinglet chirping along the trail but there



Gerry Warner

were still blooming wildflowers. To name just a few, we saw one-sided wintergreen, angelica, bog orchid, and grass-of-Parnassus. The bear grass was not blooming but there was certainly a lot of it near the top of the trail. We managed to stay together as a group on most of the way up, but on the descent various groups left at different times and at different speeds. If you have not yet done



this hike, you will have to join us the next time. The lake and surrounding mountains are lovely!

On our way up to Hourglass, we stopped at km 4.4 on Meachen Road to see the swans. They were out in the water and easy to spot. One of the swans, tagged 7A, was released in the Flathead area of Montana in 2012 as a yearling. It was spotted in the St. Mary wetlands in 2014 by Struan Robertson of Kimberley. In 2015, 7A returned to the same area but with a mate. The pair was still on the nearly frozen pond in mid November. The pair was seen at Rosicky Road on April 7, 2016, and then again in the same St. Mary wetland on April 10. It is hoped that next year they will return and start a family!

Ruth Goodwin

photos by Paul Paronetto [except one]



This article is from the Charleswood community newsletter. Paula Rogers found it interesting, and sent it in to *The Kestrel*. The subject applies to many locales, not just Alberta. Here it is, lightly edited and with web images.

## Seasonal Sights and Sounds of Alberta: Carotenoids Colour the Baltimore Oriole

The Baltimore Oriole usually arrives on our land in late May; the first evidence is either the brilliant flash of the orange colour of the male or his clear tones. His most common call is three distinctive notes, followed by a trill of six notes [the last of which is slurred downwards]. What causes his brilliant spring colour? Often colouration is seasonal, sexual and age related. Colour in birds is caused by a variety of factors, including pigments or structural characteristics of the feather.



Baltimore Oriole



Egyptian Vulture

Melanin is a pigment produced by body cells and is responsible for black and brown colouration.

Carotenoids, on the other hand, cannot be produced internally so have to be ingested. These pigments travel as complex molecules to their site of use in the feathers, skin and bills. Plants [including seeds and fruits] are known to contain hundreds of carotenoids, which are responsible for the absorption of light for photosynthesis in plants and help protect the chlorophyll from damage. When ingested by birds, they most commonly cause yellow colouration, but birds can also convert them

to give feathers a red and orange colouration. The brilliant orange of the male oriole is due to a mixture of carotenoids. Perhaps one of the most bizarre examples of carotenoid colouration is found in the Egyptian Vulture [*Neophron percnopterus*]; it consumes carotenoids in feces found within a dead animal's digestive system. This gives it a yellow facial colouration, but why?

Structural properties of the feathers are also responsible for colouration. White is due to the feather scattering light of all wavelengths equally and randomly, while iridescence [such as seen in hummingbirds] is also partly due to structural properties.



Rufous Hummingbird

Knowing a little bit about how colour is produced in birds, let's examine how we are able to see different colours. Visible light is due to a range of wavelengths of different coloured light, so the colour we see means that that colour has been reflected, not absorbed. However, its perception also depends on the photoreceptor cells [cones] in the eye. Humans have three colour cones, but interestingly most birds tested appear to have four. This extra cone enables them to see in the ultra violet [UV] range. Interestingly, owls are a notable exception because they apparently do not detect UV. It would appear that the orioles can and do see in the UV range, although we have no way of knowing what they actually see.

Having looked at what causes feather colour, let's consider the function. Bird colouration serves a wide range of functions, perhaps the most obvious of which is allowing males to attract females or vice versa. However, it's odd when you consider that this attribute also makes a bird more visible and thus prone to predation. In humans, much scientific research examines the nutritional value of pigments in food; they act as antioxidants and immune modulators and may play an invaluable role in protection against UV radiation and diseases such as cancer. Presumably brightly coloured birds indicate health. Certainly we know that parasites and bacteria can affect feather colouration, causing a somewhat drab colouration.

So let's enjoy the colours of the oriole and other bird species. Consider the females who, when making mate choices, are carefully listening to the quality of the sound whilst eyeing up the males' colours. As for those Egyptian Vultures, what could be sexier than a beautiful yellow head due to the consumption of feces!

by Sally Stuart

## Globe Thistles and Pollinators

Globe Thistles are late-season bloomers that nourish many species of pollinators from mid August until mid September. They are also excellent flowers for people who wish to observe or photograph those pollinators. Globe Thistles have compound flowers with



mason wasp



paper wasp



Great Golden Digger Wasp  
Greg Ross



Bald-faced hornet



butterfly

hundreds of florets on each globe. All but the tiniest pollinators can stand on the ball surface to sip nectar and stay in one spot long enough for multiple photos. On my wife Linda's globe thistles, I have seen many different insect pollinators. Some of the species are:



flower fly



skipper



tachinid fly



honey bees

Great Golden Digger Wasp (thanks to Greg for the macro photo), mason wasp, paper wasp, Bald-faced hornet, butterfly, skipper, flower fly,



leaf-footed bug



Two-form bumblebee



High country bumblebee



Western bumblebee



Yellowhead bumblebee

tachinid fly, honey bee, leaf-footed bug (a cousin of the stink bugs), and four bumblebee species (Two-form, Western, High country and Yellowhead bumblebees). There was even a grasshopper on a globe thistle flower-ball one day.

story and all but one photo by Frank Hastings



On September 3, 2016, members of the Rocky Mountain Naturalists and Elk River Alliance joined the Whitebark Pine Association of Canada and the Nature Conservancy of Canada to assist in recovery efforts of limber pine (*Pinus flexilis*), an endangered pine tree listed under the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC).

Limber pine is distributed from southeastern British Columbia and southwestern Alberta to northern Arizona and New Mexico and southern California. In British Columbia, limber pine occurs in a clustered distribution with many known populations separated by distances of up to 50 km.

Figure 1: Distribution of limber pine (*Pinus flexilis*) within North America. Map obtained from *Status of the Limber Pine (Pinus flexilis) in Alberta*, which was prepared by David W. Langor (2007).

There are four main threats to limber pine populations:

- White pine blister rust

White pine blister rust is caused by the fungus *Cronartium ribicola* which was introduced to British Columbia in 1910 from Europe. The fungus enters through the needles of the pine tree and travels down the branch to the main stem where it girdles and eventually kills the tree.

- Mountain pine beetle

Mountain pine beetle (*Dendroctonus ponderosae*) can kill and breed in limber pine. Trees already weakened by white pine blister rust are more susceptible to mountain pine beetle attack.

- Fire suppression

Limber pine is a poor competitor. Under natural fire regimes, low intensity fires would burn through stands, removing the understory, which would allow limber pine to establish. As well, Clark's nutcracker (*Nucifraga columbiana*), a critical disperser of limber pine seeds, uses burned sites for seed caching, allowing for rapid regeneration of limber pine. Years of fire suppression have limited the trees' ability to establish and survive on sites.



white pine blister rust photo: Michael Murray, Kootenay Boundary Region Pathologist, Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations

- Habitat destruction

The historical extent of limber pine throughout British Columbia is suspected to be much greater based on the scattered individuals found throughout the region today. Human development, such as mining, logging, roads and housing are considered factors which have contributed to population decline.

*Limber Pine Recovery Strategies: Planting*

Several strategies are used to conserve and recover limber pine, one of which is planting. Planting is considered to be one of the more productive restoration activities. Limber pine



seeds are known to readily germinate. As such, it is possible to produce good quality seedlings to be planted in one growing season, and the survival rate of planted seedlings has been observed to be high.



During the volunteer planting event on September 3, ten members of the

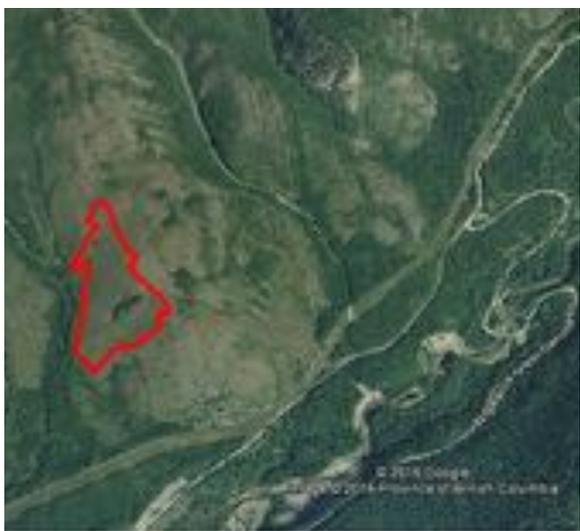
Rocky Mountain Naturalists and three members of the Elk River Alliance ventured into the Flathead to plant limber pine seedlings on south and west facing grassland slopes on Mount Broadwood. The Mount Broadwood area is a conservation area spanning 8,940 hectares which was donated to the Nature Conservancy of Canada in the 1990s by Shell Canada.



To date this site remains the largest private land donation in Canadian history.

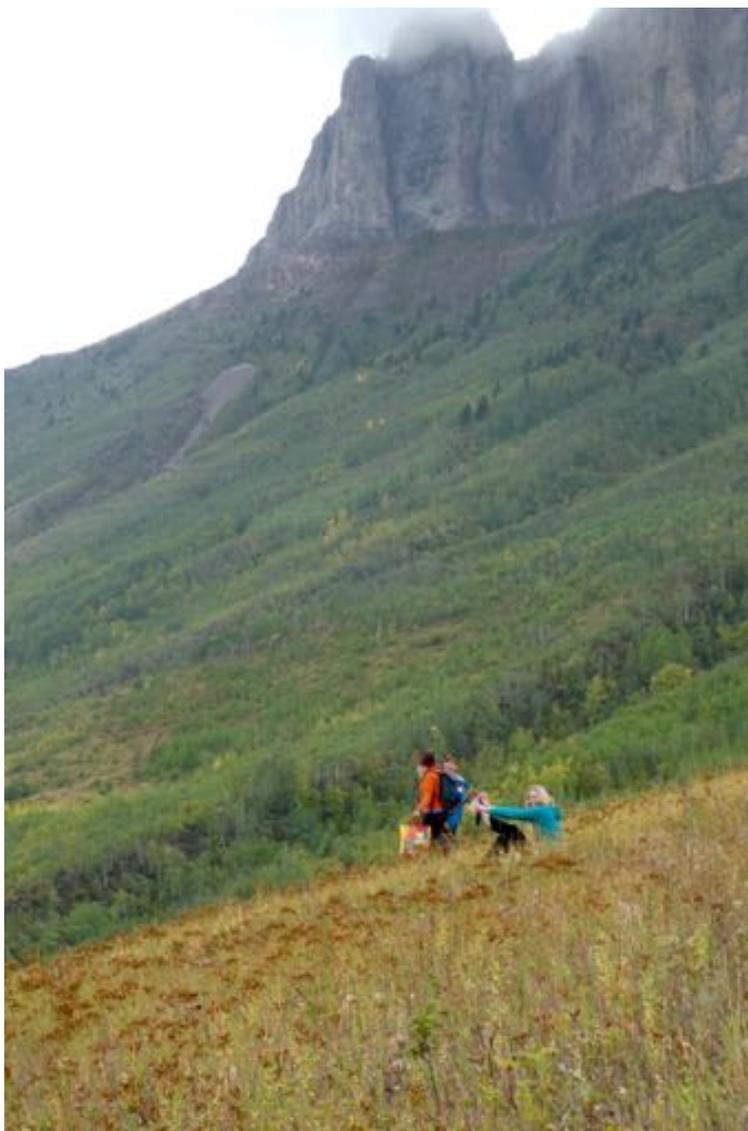
Volunteers hiked 1,500 limber pine seedlings through treed and steep terrain to reach the designated planting area on the southeast flank of Mt. Broadwood. The temperature of the day was fantastic for planting. Throughout the day cloudy skies would come and go as would spouts of rain, one of which resulted in soaked feet. Nonetheless, all volunteers were motivated to plant and progressively worked throughout the area. In total 1,180 seedlings were planted within approximately six hectares (Figure 2). The day ended with beautiful sunny skies and a well-earned BBQ put on by Richard Klafki from the Nature Conservancy of Canada.

Figure 2: Area planted with limber pine by



members of the Rocky Mountain Naturalists and Elk River Alliance.

Overall, the day was a fantastic success. The Whitebark Pine Association of Canada and the Nature Conservancy of Canada would like to thank all volunteers who participated in the planting event. Your efforts are critical in helping recover limber pine throughout Canada.



Myra Juckers  
photographs [all but one] by Greg Ross

For more information on Limber pine, go to <http://www.fgcouncil.bc.ca/LimberPine-BC-Factsheet2-April2013.pdf>.

# Remembering our friend Peter Davidson

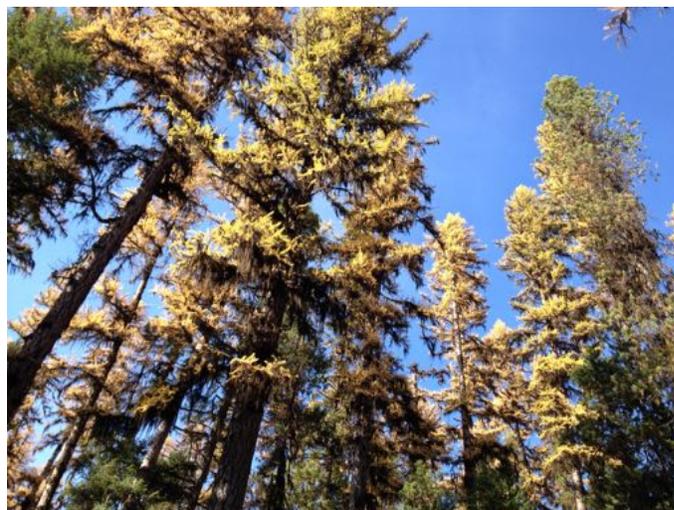
The one-year anniversary of Peter Davidson's passing is on October 25th.

How do you deal with grief and the passing of a loved one? I dealt with Peter's passage by writing him a long letter, which I posted to the celestial mailbox in the sky. I heard of this concept in a heart-felt book on death and dying called *Loving and Leaving the Good Life* by Helen Nearing. Helen and Scott Nearing were some of the original back-to-the-land hippies in New England. They left New York City in 1932 and moved to Vermont (and later to Maine) and lived the good life as homesteaders and true intellectuals. They lived their ideals of self-sufficiency, simplicity, social justice and peace.

When Scott reached the age of 100, he decided that was long enough so he stopped eating and died two weeks later. Helen then wrote her letter to Scott.

Here's one paragraph from my celestial letter to Peter:

"It is so clichéd that death teaches us about living. But I guess we constantly need the reminder. You were living your life to the fullest the last few weeks: out in the field with friends, birding and taking photographs . . . When we were driving out from the Gilnockie Nature Preserve, you kept saying, 'Look at the light; it's perfect! I have to stop and take a photograph.' The larches were golden and backlit by the evening sunshine. It was gorgeous. And we stopped over and over. You were so happy."



larches at Gilnockie

Peter died one week later.

Virginia Rasch

Each of us will honour our lost friends and relatives in our own way. I want to suggest three ways for you to honour Peter or anyone else whom you have lost or will lose in the future (after all, many of us are of the age when we are losing our parents and even some of our friends).

I suggest a financial donation in honour of a loved one. You might think, "Well, what will my tiny donation matter?" Let me tell you a secret about fundraising. Most organizations get the majority of their donations from individuals who give small amounts of money. Research shows that these small gifts often make up 80 per cent of all donations received! So those \$25, \$50 and \$100 cheques really matter and add up when combined with scores from other donors just like you.

First, you could make a donation to the Rocky Mountain Naturalists Memorial Scholarship. All donations of any size are welcomed and will be used for awarding scholarships to deserving students.

Second, you could consider a donation to the BC Naturalists' Foundation, which supports BC Nature clubs through grants. These grants are awarded for conservation or education projects. See [www.bcnature.ca](http://www.bcnature.ca) for more information.



Peter on the trail

Helga Knote

I plan on honouring Peter in a third way with a donation to a land conservation project of The Nature Trust of BC. One of Peter's many passions was bighorn sheep. The Trust is acquiring the Bull River—Grassland Corridor property, which is very important winter range for bighorn sheep. And the Bull River area is such a gorgeous, special place in southeastern B.C. If you are interested in more information on this acquisition, read the article in the Summer 2016 issue of the BC Nature magazine or visit [www.naturetrust.bc.ca](http://www.naturetrust.bc.ca).

The silver lining in our grief is knowing that we can make a lasting gift in honour and memory of our lost loved ones.

Virginia Rasch

## Internet Links

The website for Rocky Mountain Naturalists can be found at:

<http://www.rockymountainnaturalists.org/>

It has a calendar of events, a blog with photographs, archived newsletters, and more.

Make sure you are up to date on the latest techniques for keeping yourselves safe in the wild. Visit this site now and then to see how the science has given us new information.

[www.wildsafebc.com](http://www.wildsafebc.com)

B.C. Big Tree Registry <http://bcbigtree.ca>

Eagles[RMERF] <http://eaglewatch.ca/>

Astronomy <http://earthsky.org/tonight>, [heavens-above.com](http://heavens-above.com)

Limber Pine <http://www.fgcouncil.bc.ca/LimberPine-BC-Factsheet2-April2013.pdf>

## Club Information

### Executive

President	George Rogers
Past President	Ruth Goodwin
Vice President	Virginia Rasch
Secretary	Marianne Nahm
Treasurer	Linda Hastings
BC Nature Director	Greg Ross



Four-spotted skimmer at Elizabeth Lake  
Stewart Wilson

### Other Committee and Club Representatives

Little Big Day	Greg Ross
Christmas Bird Counts	Greg Ross
Elizabeth Lake	Stewart Wilson
Newsletter	Susan Walp
Speakers	Paula and Marianne
Field Trips	Paula Rogers

### Field Trips

#### Leader responsibilities:

Take radios and first aid kits.

Find a replacement leader if necessary.

Keep the group together.

All leaders must have trip waiver forms [available from Paula] in case any non-members come along on the trip. Non-members must sign, and forms must be returned to Paula. Non-member insurance costs \$2.00.

Make sure everybody leaves the parking area safely.

Get someone to write an account of the field trip for the newsletter. Send it in, along with pictures, as soon as possible.

Carpoolers: Please offer to chip in for gas.

No dogs on field trips, please

### Upcoming Events

Garage Sale – Saturday, September 24

Lazy Lake Paddle - Sunday, September 25

EKISC [Invasive Species Council] Open House - September 29, 5-8 PM at the Manual Training Center, Cranbrook Library - All are welcome.

Big Juniper - Sunday, October 2

New Lake to Jimsmith - October 23

RMNats meetings - every two months, in odd-numbered months

Next meeting - Wednesday, November 16