

# The Kestrel

Quarterly Newsletter of the  
Rocky Mountain Naturalists

2014 fall equinox

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Do you have a good kestrel picture [our local species, the American Kestrel] for the first page of the newsletter? If so, please email it to the newsletter.

# Club Camp 2014

June 20, 21, 22



naturalists in action



remains of an avalanche

The Rocky Mountain Naturalists club camp was held in Fernie this year. People stayed either in Mt. Fernie Provincial Park or in a motel, meeting at one of the campsites for a campfire at 6 Friday evening. Nine RMNats, a guest from Crowsnest and our gracious friends/guides and hosts, Bob, Linda, Mike and Laura, of the Fernie Naturalists Club, enjoyed this annual event.



mossy tree

A list of bird species seen can be found on our "Bird Sightings" page at

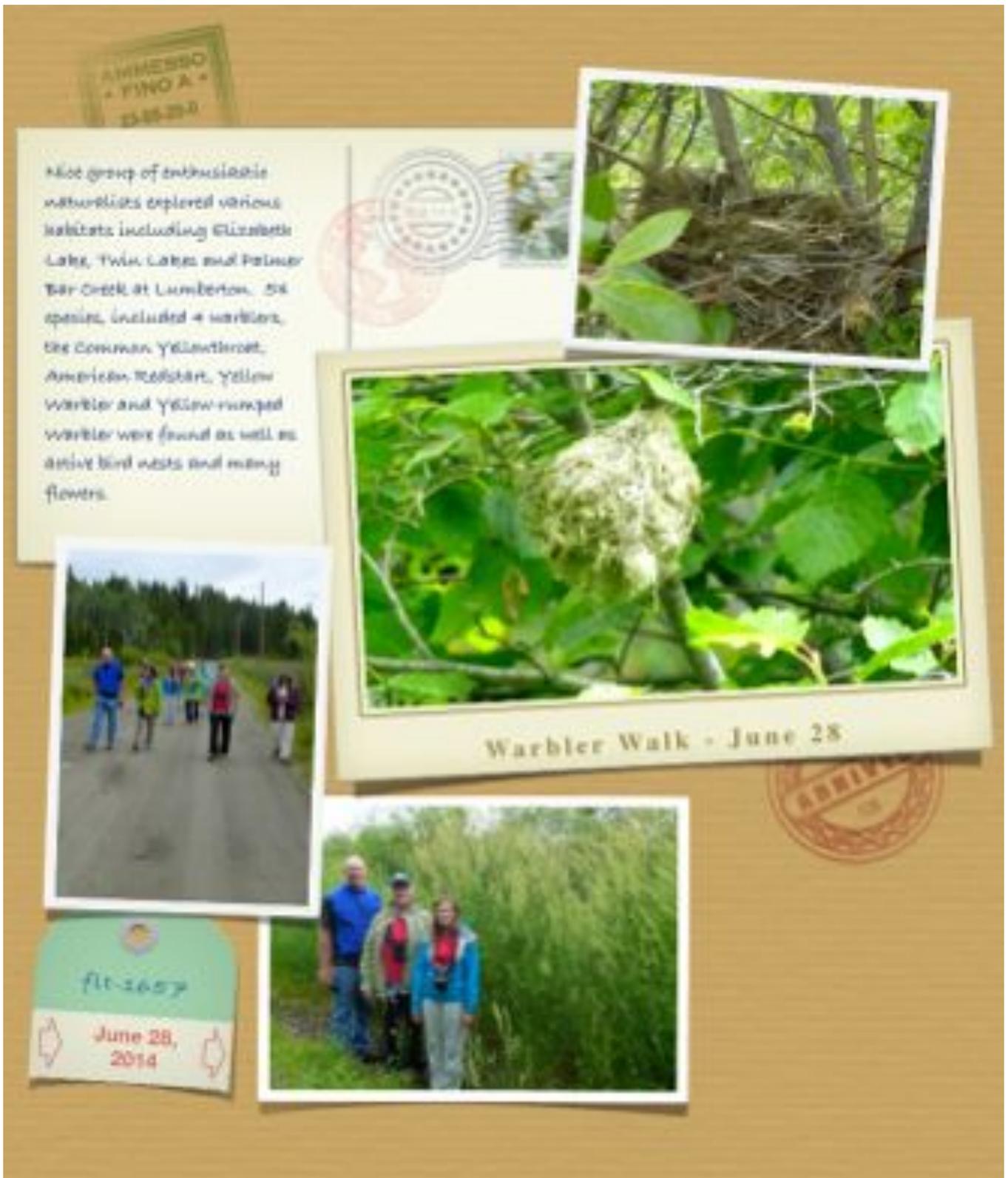
<http://www.rockymountainnaturalists.org/bird-sightings.html>.

photos and story: Greg Ross

[more information on the blog, and more photos in the slideshow on the blog at [rockymountainnaturalists.org](http://rockymountainnaturalists.org)]

# Warbler Walk

June 28



Greg Ross

# King Street Ditch Walk

## June 30

Nowadays, it's not often that Latin is heard in general conversation, but when a bunch of naturalists are plunked into a ditch on the edge of town... One evening, 17 keen club members walked along the edge of King Street north of Wilks Road, observing and identifying a surprising number of plants. Our goal was to find a patch of wood



Greg looking at nature

lilies which bloom each year around this time, and we were rewarded with the sight of 15 fine, large, red-orange blossoms. In addition to the lilies, we noted bog orchids, paintbrush and grasses as well as many invasive plants with their somewhat attractive flowers. Part of the group headed back along the road, while the more adventurous ones made a loop up and over a wooded ridge. Afterwards, we enjoyed tasty snacks and the warmth of the fire pit.



Lyle wood lily



Paula shows a grass flower head [grasses are flowering plants, too]

Daryl Calder

Greg



Lyle foxtail



around the fire pit

Greg

# West Hills Walk

## July 12

Attached are a few photos of the outing I led on July 12<sup>th</sup> into the West Hills, behind our property. I think there were twelve of us, including me. It was a perfectly clear July morning when we set out at 9:30 am and even though the sun was already hot, the forest remained cool in the shadows of the trees. We walked along one of the many old skid roads, working our way to the top of the bluffs overlooking Cranbrook, where expansive views greeted us. The forest in this area is mainly coniferous, with a mix of second-growth Interior Douglas-fir, western larch, ponderosa pine and a few lodgepole pine that have survived the pine beetle outbreak. In open glades shrubs such as soopolallie, saskatoon, gooseberries and currants are abundant and the ground cover is a mix of grasses, Oregon-grape, spirea varieties, wild sarsaparilla, various mosses and lichens and occasional saprophytes such as pinedrops and Indian-pipe. From the bluffs we enjoyed views of Fisher Peak and the Steeples, Baker Mountain, Cranbrook and Moyie Mountains and the fire-swept hills in the Lamb Creek area before continuing on along the ridge and down into the mixed forest just above Weekes Road. There was a considerable amount of avian activity there, and we spent some time listening for bird calls and following a variety of birds with our binoculars. Finally, we began the uphill trek back to our starting point, which began to get pretty warm, with the sun rising higher in the sky and the dry forest soaking in the heat. It was 1:00 pm when we reached our sunny, hot meadow and the conclusion of this hike. Helga



gathering in the morning

Helga



in the cool forest

Helga



looking at something interesting

Helga



a rock with a view

Greg



Helga

naturalists on bluff



Fisher Peak in the distance

Greg



looking southeast

Greg

# Wigwam Flats

July 13

A group of RMNats met with naturalists from the Crow and Fernie areas for a trip into the Wigwam Flats Access Management Area. We were catching this opportunity before vehicle access would be restricted after July 15th.

The Wigwam Flats area is a natural mosaic of grasslands, open forests and closed forests — it's very diverse. It supports mule deer, whitetail deer, elk, and the predators who prey on those species. So we have the full suite of wildlife that inhabit that area.

The group explored along the road, identifying [and sampling] many species of plants. Then some went up in the hills while the rest hiked down to the river junction, where the Wigwam flows into the Elk River.



Greg dogbane



sagebrush mariposa lily

Joy



Elk and Wigwam confluence seen from above

Greg



Joy in the Elk River canyon



yellow mountain-avens Joy



nodding onion Joy



salsify [goat's beard] Joy



wild bergamot [horse mint] Joy



Wigwam joining Elk River

Joy

Here is a link to The Nature Trust of BC's Wigwam Flats page: <http://www.naturetrustbcmaps.ca/index.cfm/nature-trust-sites/?siteID=E68E7511-E9AA-F84D-D6CB15501CAB1079>.

# Pollinator Walk

July 19

Eight people attended the pollinator walk starting at Frank and Linda Hastings' linden tree on 49th Street South. We observed, discussed and photographed the insect activity on its flowers. The walkers then visited Ursula Brigl's garden next door for a tour of her pollinator activity. Next, we walked south along the 30th Avenue right-of-way into the re-growth zone of a 10+ year-old clear-cut area SW of 53rd Street South. Following that, we returned to the home of Frank and Linda Hastings for refreshments.

story and photos: Frank Hastings



linden tree in bloom



Nine people drove a long way to near the US border to see an ecological reserve which has been created in order to protect the huge larches growing on that site. A storm the night before blew down some trees, making access difficult in places. The forest floor was wet, soaking through hikers' boots and clothing, but there was plenty to see. It was a beautiful trip, and impressive.

Susan

photos by Greg



pipsissewa [prince's pine]



wild raspberry

Please visit the RMNats blog. You will find a more detailed article and wonderful photos.

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

# Paddle on Moyie Lake

August 4

Storm clouds did not deter our group of eight. Optimistically, Barb suggested that we should drive to the Porto Rico Rd put-in, and if the weather was bad, at least we could go to the Moyie Pub. After driving through a thundershower, we found dry, calm conditions, and, without hesitation, set out. The Moyie River flows south between the two lakes; we paddled against the gentle flow through picturesque wetlands. Lamb Creek flows in from the west providing a sandbar and a grassy, willowy meadow. Field guides were consulted. The lake was pleasant for swimming, and the picnic well deserved. And, wouldn't you know it, a tail wind made the return trip a snap.

story and photos by Daryl



Barb and Rocke enter the river, followed by Jim.



old pilings once used for log booms



Fresh willows grow as water level drops.



Paula and George hug the shore.



Laura and Jim approach Lamb Creek.

# Shore Birds

August 16

and

# World Shorebirds Day

September 6

The First Annual WORLD SHOREBIRDS DAY (<http://worldshorebirdsday.wordpress.com>) on 6 September 2014 caught the imagination of many people – over one thousand counting locations around the world were registered in this officially sanctioned event. It's no wonder really, for shorebirds connect us all to each other through their home at the intersection of air, water, and all the land on Earth. Never mind that they are so varied and beautiful, with their subtle colours, shapes and sizes, or are just plain fun to watch as they scurry from the lapping waves or stick their bills up to their eyeballs in mucky mud probing for their dinner.

They are also tough little things, braving hurricanes and forest fires, sometimes flying vast distances over the open sea or rugged land for days on end on their seasonal migrations. With the development and use of small, retrievable geo-locators, we can now see their remarkable odysseys. This past year, one little male Semipalmated Sandpiper from the eastern Arctic flew over 10,000 miles including a six day, 3,300-mile nonstop flight across the Atlantic Ocean from James Bay to South America (see <http://shorebirdscience.org/coats-2014-06/>).

Closer to home, although we don't have a lot of shore, we have some good spots where shorebirds can be found during migration, and the relative rarity of 'our' shorebirds makes them all the more precious. A few of us went out several times to look for shorebirds including a field trip led by Peter D. on 16 August 2014, a couple of spontaneous birding trips by others, and three people on the actual World Shorebirds Day.

We obtained permission from the landowners to get closer to the edge of the pond on Rosicky Road. This was very much appreciated, since the view from the road is a bit distant for clearly identifying the smaller bird species. Another good place, and of much interest this year, is the City of Cranbrook Spray Irrigation Reservoir east of Highway 3 towards Fernie. Managers have been altering the water levels between the two sections which left a substantial area exposed for the last two weeks of August. At present, they are drawing down the northern section and refilling the southern section. For a little while it was hopping with shorebirds: lots of Baird's Sandpipers, especially, and a few quite rare species for the area.

Dianne C.

Following is a list of highlights of the season (August, September):

Western Grebe	Stilt Sandpiper	Bonaparte's Gull
Double-crested Cormorant	Sanderling	Ring-billed Gull
American Golden-Plover	Baird's Sandpiper	California Gull
Semipalmated Plover	Least Sandpiper	Herring Gull
Killdeer	Pectoral Sandpiper	Forster's Tern
Spotted Sandpiper	Semipalmated Sandpiper	Peregrine Falcon
Solitary Sandpiper	Western Sandpiper	Say's Phoebe
Greater Yellowlegs	Long-billed Dowitcher	Palm Warbler
Lesser Yellowlegs	Wilson's Snipe	American Pipit
Long-billed Curlew	Wilson's Phalarope	Rusty Blackbird
	Red-necked Phalarope	

And here is the complete list of birds recorded 16 August 2014:

Number of Species 56

Number of Individuals 444

Number of Checklists 7

Species Name	High Count	Species Name	High Count
Canada Goose	68	Red-naped Sapsucker	1
Gadwall	2	Northern Flicker	1
Mallard	6	American Kestrel	2
Blue-winged Teal	2	Merlin	1
Green-winged Teal	6	Western Wood-Pewee	2
Canvasback	2	Western Kingbird	3
Bufflehead	1	Eastern Kingbird	7
Common Goldeneye	8	Cassin's Vireo	1
Ruddy Duck	6	Gray Jay	1
Common Loon	2	Black-billed Magpie	2
Great Blue Heron	2	Common Raven	2
Turkey Vulture	6	swallow sp.	3
Osprey	7	Red-breasted Nuthatch	2
Bald Eagle	5	Western Bluebird	4
Red-tailed Hawk	2	Mountain Bluebird	6
American Coot	15	American Robin	14
Killdeer	20	Varied Thrush	2
Spotted Sandpiper	1	European Starling	30
Solitary Sandpiper	1	Cedar Waxwing	10
Greater Yellowlegs	6	Yellow Warbler	1
Lesser Yellowlegs	4	Yellow-rumped Warbler	4
Least Sandpiper	2	Chipping Sparrow	2
Western Sandpiper	20	Vesper Sparrow	8
Red-necked Phalarope	2	Savannah Sparrow	2
Ring-billed Gull	3	Western Tanager	1
Herring Gull	1	Western Meadowlark	1
Mourning Dove	2	Red Crossbill	12
Common Nighthawk	4		
Belted Kingfisher	1		



shorebird counters Dianne C.



Stilt Sandpiper Greg R.



Dean N. American Golden-Plover



Greg gaining some height

Dianne C.

# Rainbows

Have you ever wondered about colours in the sky?

A rainbow is an optical and meteorological phenomenon that is caused by both reflection and refraction of light in water droplets. In a double rainbow, a second arc is seen outside the primary arc and has the order of its colours reversed. The second rainbow is caused by light reflecting twice within the droplets. Rainbows can be formed by many forms of airborne water including mist, spray and airborne dew.

Rainbows form a significant part of human culture, frequently occurring in mythology. Aristotle, 384 –322 BC, was the first to devote serious attention to this phenomenon. His qualitative explanation showed an inventiveness and relative consistency that was unmatched for centuries. During the 1600's, Descartes experimented by passing rays of light through a water-filled glass sphere. He measured the angles and derived the Law of Refraction.

Recently, I have been fascinated by 'supernumerary' rainbows. It seems that when raindrops are not uniform in size, 'constructive and destructive interference' of each colour causes a set of bows to become visible inside the primary arc, mostly a repetition of red and green. Within a double rainbow lies an area of unlit sky referred to as Alexander's Band. First described in 200 AD, and named after Alexander of Aphrodisias, light reflected in this region cannot reach the observer, appearing as a dark band. With my new interest, I'll be looking for Red Bows, Reflection Bows, Reflected Bows and Twinned Bows.



view over Beacon Hill from Wilks Road

image and text submitted by Daryl

## Alligator Lizard

On a late August afternoon, we discovered a friendly creature climbing our warm stone steps. The slim tail was longer than its body and its tiny toes clung to the rough rock. The Northwestern Alligator Lizard is brown or grey with some dark spots and stripes on the belly. If attacked, the tail can break off, continue to wiggle and distract a predator. Over time, a new tail will grow; it is shorter and plumper. As the tail is an important fat reserve, tail 'autonomy' usually is a tactic of last resort. As evidenced by the number of lizards with regenerated tails, however, it is also a successful tactic.

In BC, Northwestern Alligator Lizards appear to remain near their hibernacula year round. The young develop inside the mother's body, and after carrying the young all summer 4-6 are born in late summer. Females mate every two years on average as they require time to eat, grow and regain their stores of body fat. They eat large insects, such as beetles, caterpillars and grasshoppers, as well as spiders, snails, scorpions and millipedes.

For basking, lizards need sunny openings. Luckily for them, openings are often created through disturbances such as logging. The Northwestern Alligator Lizard often benefits from some level of disturbance, making it one of the more resilient reptile species in BC.

story and photo by Daryl



Northwestern Alligator Lizard

## September Meeting

Our business meeting on 17 September 2014 was followed by a presentation. Solnja Seher of Wildsafe BC talked to us, and presented slides, about safety around bears, cougars, ungulates and coyotes in our area. Please visit the website and learn the latest on how to be safe around wildlife. [www.wildsafebc.com](http://www.wildsafebc.com)

## Club Information

### Executive

President	Peter Davidson
Vice President	Tara Szkorupa
Secretary	Marianne Nahm
Treasurer	Lois Gruenig
BC Nature Director	Greg Ross
Field Trips	George and Paula Rogers
Presentations	Marianne Nahm

### Other Committee and Club Representatives

Little Big Day	Greg Ross
Christmas Bird Counts	Greg Ross
Elizabeth Lake	Tara Szkorupa
Newsletter	Susan Walp

### Field Trips

Leader responsibilities:

Find a replacement leader if necessary.

Keep the group together.

Make sure everybody leaves the parking area safely.

Get someone to write an account of the field trip.

Carpoolers: Please offer to chip in for gas.

No dogs on field trips, please, unless otherwise specified

Upcoming Events

September	29	Mon	5 p.m.	Elizabeth Lake	work bee	Tara
October	5	Sun	1 p.m.	Bummers Flats	Tony Wideski memorial	Marianne
	12	Sun	11 a.m.	Negro Lake		Greg
	18	Sat	9 a.m.	Wigwam bicycle trip		Marianne
	22	Wed	7 p.m.	COTR	Go-go Grannies travelog [rafting the Grand Canyon]	Greg
December	14	Sun		Fernie Christmas bird count		
	21	Sun		Cranbrook Christmas bird count		
January	4	Sun		Kimberly Christmas bird count		



If you'd like to see your dog here, please send a picture of your dog to the newsletter.

## Meetings

Held every two months, in odd-numbered months [RMNats general meetings]

### Upcoming Meetings

September 25-28, - BC Nature Conference and Fall General Meeting, 2014 Salmon & Shorebirds – Incredible Journeys - Prestige Harbourfront Resort, Salmon Arm

November 19 Wed 7 p.m. COTR RMNats general meeting