

The Kestrel

Quarterly Newsletter of the
Rocky Mountain Naturalists

2014 summer solstice



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.

inside this issue

Kestrels on the deck	2
field trips	
Anne Redfern Walk	3
The Buttes	4
Columbia/Hoodoos	7
Isadore Canyon	10
Community Forest	10
Impromptu Hike	12
book review	14
Creston Bird Festival	9
club information	15
executive	
committees	
field trips	
meetings	

Deck kestrels



A couple of fledgling Kestrels took a morning rest break on our deck last August. While the parents circled overhead calling, Linda took pictures and moved furniture so

that one fledgling had enough take-off room to clear the glass deck railing. The other fledgling she had to herd towards the picket railing at the east end of our deck. It finally climbed through a gap between two pickets and flew off to join its family.

Frank Hastings



Anne Redfern Memorial Walk

March 22

When starting our Anne Redfern Memorial Walk, we remembered how Anne enjoyed driving around in the spring "hunting" for all kinds of bird life returning to our valley! To start with, we found that Wasa Lake had no open water, except around the edges, and no waterfowl. About a dozen of us headed over to Wasa Slough to enjoy swans and ducks in some very unspring-like weather! With temperatures hovering around zero degrees, we walked the road behind the sloughs and saw both Trumpeter and Tundra Swans, around 50 in total. We saw an otter playing on the ice, several Bald Eagles overhead, and at least one Rough-legged Hawk. It was great when Greg spotted an Eurasian Widgeon in the mix of ducks as you don't always see them every year. Also migrating through were pintails, shovelers, both goldeneye species, Ring-necked Ducks and Green-winged Teals. At Mildred's Meadow, there were no buttercups, but buds were found. Once we get some decent spring temperatures, there should be lots of blossoms to enjoy!



looking at the swans [not icebergs, swans!]

Ruth Goodwin

photos: Ruth



The Buttes

April 12

Usually, a spring wildflower walk conjures images of fragrant breezes and puffy clouds, with shirt sleeved folks knee deep in daisies. Of course, a Rocky Mountain Naturalist hike tends to be a bit more of an adventure. Eleven of us traversed Potato Hill and Lone Pine Hill



Daryl

overlooking St. Mary Prairie on a fine, cool, grey day. Immediately, with close inspection, we discovered that the bleak, windswept, dry hillside offered a wonderful array of delicate flowers, animal signs and birdlife. Prairie crocus, recently emerged, caught

Daryl

droplets from melting snowflakes in its down, while western spring beauty, with its edible



prairie crocus

Lyle



Joy

spring beauty

corn, provided a strong clue as to the name given to the First Butte.

Depending upon variations in aspect, elevation and overstorey, we discovered long-flowered mertensia, lomatium, rock cress, cinquefoil and stonecrop



mertensia

Lyle



Helga

yellowbells [yellow fritillary]



sagebrush buttercup

Joy



Helga

woodpeckers' work

woodpecker were active. A peculiar scat, mid-trail, posed a puzzle. Later, we concluded

showing early development. Later, a few yellowbells, budding shooting stars and sagebrush buttercups brightened the scene. In a few weeks, balsamroot will dominate the slopes in dramatic fashion; sharp eyed naturalists were able to notice a few early leaf buds and pale flowers.

Part of our group returned to McClure Road, while eight of us enjoyed the protection of the forest as we headed north toward the Second Butte. Evidently, judging by the size, shape and position of cavities, bark flakes and wood chips, several species of



Helga checking out the fallen tree

that a Wild Turkey was nearby. The singular hoot of a Dusky Grouse and the trill of a Varied Thrush indicated other unseen forest dwellers.

The group sought the shelter of a big tree before heading up to the exposed top of Lone Pine. Nearby, a hand dug shaft with copper staining provided a clue that hard working pioneers had attempted to make

a meagre living decades earlier. Very recent excavations indicated badger activity. Several trees had been cut and purposely infected with heart rot in order to favour Lewis' Woodpeckers. The Rockies were mostly hidden by dark snow squalls, but the stormy skies added a unique 'black and white' dimension to the foreground landscape. Descending the steep trail to the north, we paused to enjoy the antics of a tiny, stocky songbird. The frenetically active Golden Crowned Kinglet can survive minus 40 degree nights, sometimes huddling together for warmth. Western Meadowlarks sang while we poked around old cabins and farm machinery wreckage, while Yellow-Pine Chipmunks, Western Red Squirrels and Columbian Ground Squirrels caught our attention. Thanks to our flower experts and birders, the group enjoyed a great outing rich in local and natural history.



badger hole

Helga

Daryl Calder

observed birds

Bald Eagle

American Kestrel

Sharp-shinned Hawk

Western Meadowlark

Townsend's Solitaire

Hairy Woodpecker

Northern Flicker

White-breasted Nuthatch

Red-breasted Nuthatch

Mountain Bluebird

Western Bluebird

Mountain Chickadee

Dark-eyed Junco

Golden-crowned Kinglet

Tree Swallow

Rock Pigeon

American Crow

Clark's Nutcracker

Canada Goose

Red-winged Blackbird

Dusky Grouse

Varied Thrush



prairie crocus

Helga

Dutch Creek Hoodoos/Headwaters of the Columbia River

April 27

Thirteen eager RM Nats braved a variety of weather elements on their journey up to the top of the Dutch Creek Hoodoos. A bounty of spring crocuses along with a multitude of other plants including pussytoes, balsamroot, prairie sage, pasture sage, wild onion and buffalo berry



prairie crocus Joy (soopolallie) lined our gradual upward journey. Once at the top of the saw-toothed ridges of the hoodoos breathtaking views, even with the billowing clouds, could be seen in every direction. Our very knowledgeable leader



Helga Dutch Creek [lower right], Columbia Lake [background]

Daryl explained how the hoodoos were formed thousands of years ago and the composition of them. A narrow, sandy path wound its way along the rim of the hoodoos providing spectacular views down the sheer ravines to Dutch Creek far below while in the distance Columbia Lake glistened in the occasional sunburst. We were delighted to spot Canada Geese, Turkey Vultures, Osprey, Cooper's Hawk, Red-Tailed Hawk, Northern Flicker, Clark's Nutcracker, Common Raven, Black-Capped Chickadees, Red-breasted Nuthatches, Ruby-Crowned Kinglets, Townsend's Solitaire, Common Loon, Bald Eagle, Tree Swallows, Brewer's Blackbirds,



looking up Dutch Creek from the hoodoos Joy



Joy looking at the Rockies from the top of the hoodoos

various waterfowl as well as an abundance of kestrels and Western Meadowlarks.

From the Dutch Creek Hoodoos we proceeded to the source of the mighty Columbia River at Canal Flats. An easy stroll along a path lined with poplars, spruce and willows afforded views of huge boggy areas covered in grassy hummocks and undergrowth including budding birches and red-osier dogwood stems. We contemplated the difficulties which David Thompson must have encountered as his party portaged south to the Kootenay River

200 years earlier. At the edge of the woods, a series of springs formed little channels which converged and flowed to the north. Large patches of cattails, water grasses and roses grew in profusion throughout this area. The streams flowing out to the lake were crystal clear and, by the abundance of tracks along their edges, provide drinking water for the many animals that frequent this area. At this area we added Ruffed Grouse, Dark-Eyed Junco, Killdeer, American Robin and Red-Winged Blackbird to our list of birds.



RMNats in the headwaters parking lot

Helga

The perfect ending for our day was spotting an osprey with a fish held in its talons looking for a place to have its lunch as well as field after field of shooting stars in full bloom creating a magenta carpet along the roadside at Skookumchuck Prairie.

Submitted by Paula Rogers



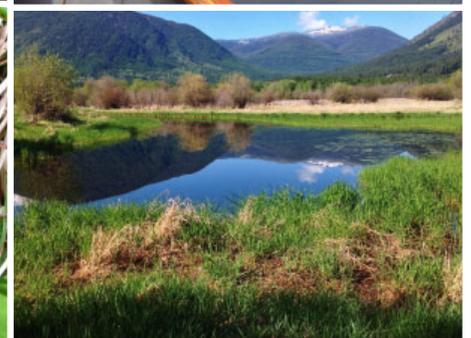
Purcell Mountains and Columbia Headwaters

Helga

Creston Valley Bird Festival

May 9-11

Joy Grassmick took these pictures of a hike led by Daryl to Balancing Rock during this festival.



Isadore Canyon Bike Excursion

May 31

Weather on Saturday morning, May 31, was perfect for a bike ride in Isadore Canyon. Eleven of us headed out to enjoy the birds and flowers on the first 11 km of this trail. Marianne also showed us some historic sites from when the railway bed was built. Three and half hours later when we were returning to our vehicles, it had warmed up nicely, and the mosquitos were getting to be a nuisance!

Ruth Goodwin

Community Forest Hike

Six of us hiked seven km from the college trail head to the big tree [150 m above our starting point] and on to Mayook's lookoff, where we stopped for a look over Cranbrook before we came back. We went at a leisurely pace, pausing to look at nature, learn from each other and take pictures whenever we felt like it. We got rained on a little, but not much; it was nothing more than a cooling shower as we returned to the trail head.

June 1



five hikers

Joy



Joy

Mayook's lookoff

The birders in our group listed 36 species. Greg submitted them to ebird, at <http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist?subID=S18656958>

We compiled the following list of plants:



Douglas-fir buds



Joy

Douglas-fir new growth

- ponderosa pine
- Douglas-fir
- spruce
- larch
- juniper
- rocky mountain common
- aspen
- birch
- Oregon-grape
- kinnikinnick
- hawthorn
- saskatoon

choke cherry
 antelope-brush [bitterbrush]
 strawberry
 early blue violet
 shooting star
 alumroot
 woodland star
 puccoon
 stickseed
 desert-parsley [lomatium]
 Drummond's rockcress
 larkspur
 anemone
 old man's whiskers
 shrubby penstemon
 sedum [stonecrop]
 lupine
 balsamroot
 dandelion
 pussytoes
 field
 rosy
 racemose
 yarrow
 fleabane [daisy]
 meadow death-camas
 star-flowered false Solomon's-seal
 calypso orchid [fairyslipper]
 arnica



choke cherry

Greg



antelope-brush

Greg

Excepting trees, these were the species in flower. There are lots more up there.
 Susan Walp



Joy

shrubby penstemon

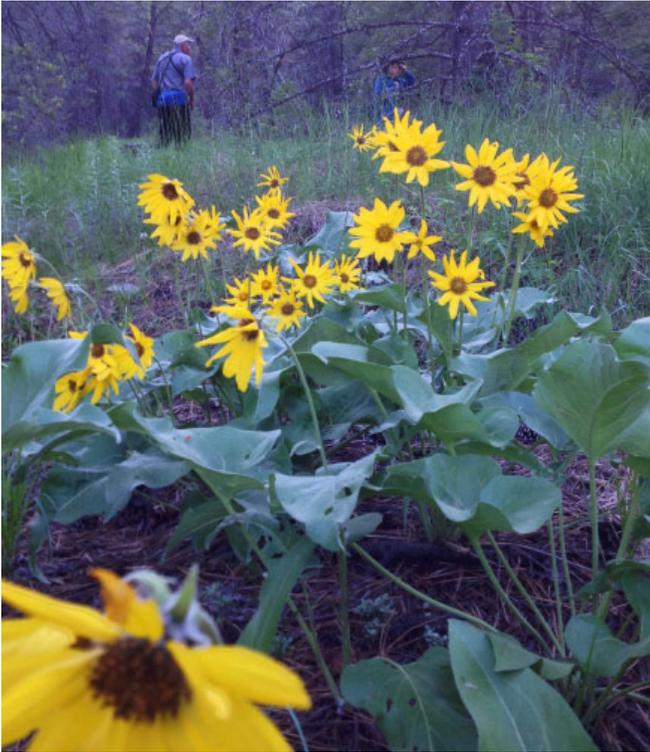


balsamroot

Joy

Impromptu Evening Hike

June 5



Joy balsamorhiza and hikers

The outskirts of Cranbrook provide many opportunities for a quick evening walk on an early June evening. Marianne and Daryl led naturalists on a mini adventure a short distance from the north end of Wilks Road. The first goal was an unusually dense patch of *Calypso bulbosa* (fairyslipper, Venus-slipper or calypso orchid). Although smaller than the orchids you see in shops, this is one of our largest native orchids. It is also the most exquisite as well as the most elusive. Its favourite habitat is pine woods, where it grows in the damp litter of the forest floor. This true member of the orchid family grows from a corm, an underground storage organ, actually the swollen base of the stem, which is all that remains after the plant flowers and seeds in early summer. As with all orchids, this flower grows



calypso orchid Daryl

only in association with a certain type of fungus. As a result, it is virtually impossible to transplant. This plant suffers from over-picking by collectors. Picking this flower will kill the plant, so it is best to leave this, as well as all wild flowers, to mature unimpaired. Earlier, we counted over 100 orchids in an area of about one square meter. This patch may be successful because of continuous shade, abundant rotting material and its secluded location.



Joy view from up the hill

Leaving the dense, north facing forest, we walked up a south aspect grassy slope. The yellow arnica and balsamorhiza were amazing, interspersed with numerous, fragrant, light yellow bitterbrush flowers. Bitterbrush belongs to the rose family, and, like

native rose species, has five petals on each little flower.

These small flowers attract night flying moths which provide an important food supply for the Common Poorwill. A small nightjar of the arid West, this poorwill is the smallest member of its family in North America. It is one of the few birds known to hibernate in the winter. It is very well camouflaged, coloured in browns, black and grey. This medium-sized bird is large headed with a tiny bill and very tiny feet. This bird can slow its metabolic rate and drop its temperature, going into a hibernation-like state known as torpor. In periods of cold weather, when insects are inactive, a poorwill may stay in torpor for several weeks. These birds hide during the day, emerging at dark to feed. They are very difficult to see, but several were heard during the week of the evening walk, flying past our house on Wilks Road near midnight.

Submitted by Daryl Calder

There were ant lion traps on the hill that evening!
Ant lions [neither ants nor lions] are insects. The larvae live below the funnel-shaped traps they make, and they feed on ants which wander in.



ant lion traps Greg



shrubby penstemon blossoms poking up through low branches of a Douglas-fir [left] Joy

Ponderosa pine trees were blooming, too [below]. Pollen from the male cones [catkins] lands on the female cones, which mature into pine cones.

info from Susan, photos by Joy



book review

'This thorough guide is a must-have for novice and expert birders alike.'
-from the back cover

BIRDFINDING in British Columbia
by Russell Cannings and Richard Cannings, illustrated by Donald Gunn

Veteran naturalist and birdfinder Richard Cannings and his son, Russell, a gifted birder in his own right, use their combined knowledge and expertise to guide readers to the best birding sites in BC. The authors divide the province into eleven regions, from Vancouver island to the Far North, providing detailed information about how to reach the best sites to look for birds, when to look for them, and what you might find. BIRDFINDING is packed with descriptions of the natural history, ecosystems, and diverse landscapes, and accompanied by numerous sketches and maps.

I particularly liked the section, 'A Quick Natural History of British Columbia', spanning 200 million years!

Published by Greystone Books
ISBN 978-1-77100-003-1

Submitted by Daryl Calder

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

ongoing - Tuesdays @ 7AM - Elizabeth Lake - Early Morning Birding - meet: at Tourist Info Centre

Saturday 28 June - warbler hike - Peter is leading a hike out Lumberton way in search of warblers and other song birds. Meet at the Elizabeth Lake info centre at 8:30 am. Bring a lunch and we will stop and swap stories about what we have seen. Should be done shortly after lunch. Let trips director know if you plan to come.

Saturday 9 August from 2PM till 9PM - Summer BBQ - Greg and Sues

meetings

held every two months, in odd-numbered months

upcoming meetings

Wednesday 16 July @ 7PM - Rocky Mountain Naturalists outdoor business meeting at Reade Lake, Wycliffe, BC

Wednesday 17 September @ 7PM



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