

The Kestrel

Quarterly Newsletter of the
Rocky Mountain Naturalists
2015 summer solstice



Linda Van Damme, Creston

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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.

Golden Eagle Migration

March 21-22

Some background information from Daryl

Golden Eagles, the ones we see locally, winter in northern Texas, New Mexico and northern Mexico, according to Peter Sherrington of the Crowsnest Conservation Society. They follow the Pacific Flyway, which has at least three branches. We witnessed the segment of the flyway which hugs the lee of the continental divide. In their quest to expend as little energy as possible, these birds have learned how to gain elevation by taking advantage of natural air currents of prevailing winds crossing the Rocky Mountains. Golden eagles prefer to soar and glide rather than flap wings. The updrafts caused by topography are exploited by the birds. In a matter of minutes, a bird can gain thousands of meters, then glide or dive in order to catch the next updraft. The big dark birds are heading for the treeline, hoping to coincide with their primary prey species, the lagomorphs [hares, rabbits and pikas]. If significant numbers of snowshoe hares are encountered, breeding will likely occur. Of course, lagomorph populations are cyclical; golden eagles respond accordingly and may migrate but not breed. On their way south, several other flyways may provide an advantage and the concentrations of eagles is dispersed.



Livingstone Front creating air mass "elevator"

Daryl

Golden Eagle Spring Migration Trip:

Report by Virginia and Daryl

Eight Rocky Mountain Naturalists headed to the Crowsnest Pass area to visit the site of the largest Golden Eagle migration in the world. Member Phil Nicholas was our unofficial leader as he just moved from there within the past year.



Frank Slide Face

Daryl

We met several local birders at the parking lot of the Frank Slide Interpretive Centre. There is a trail right behind the centre that will lead you to spots to view the migration. We instead drove a few minutes farther up the dirt road to a place the locals call Raymond's Bench.

For future reference, most vehicles could easily

make it to this location. Flagging tape marks the trailhead on the right-hand side of the road. We only had to hike in about 10 minutes, set up our folding chairs and get out our binoculars and spotting scopes to watch the show.

Denise Coccioloni-Amatto was our unofficial local host. She was extremely proficient at identifying and aging all the migrating raptors. We were there from 1115 to 1540, and Phil went back from 1800 to 2000. Sixty-three migrant raptors were seen moving north along the Livingstone Ridge: 52 Golden Eagles (48 adults, 2 subadults, and 2 juveniles), 6 Bald Eagles (3 adults, 1 subadult, and 2 juveniles), 2 Northern Goshawks, 1 Red-tailed Hawk, and 2 unidentified eagles. Only two birds were seen after 1800: 1 juvenile Golden Eagle and 1 adult Bald Eagle.



snowy ridge of "the next day" Phil

A A gusty, snowy squall came in, and we folded up shop and headed to our vehicles. Denise invited us to her house for dinner along with several members of the Crowsnest Conservation Society.

Three of the Naturalists headed home for the night. The rest of us slept overnight at a lovely new motel in Blairmore.

The next day, Phil headed up the same road and drove in mud and snow and then hiked into the ridge top that we were looking up at the day before. He had to walk in mud one foot deep and in snow two feet deep, but he had some great views of eagles.

The four of us Naturalists were toured around Lundbreck, Alberta, to river, grassland and pothole habitats. The most interesting birds were a ferruginous hawk and tundra swans. We missed seeing the Eurasian widgeon that birders had seen recently.

Our destination was Beaver Mines, where Peter Sherrington lives. He is the one who discovered this stellar golden eagle migration, and he has been collecting eagle data for the past 23 years. He also founded the Rocky Mountain Eagle Research Foundation ([www. eaglewatch.ca](http://www.eaglewatch.ca)).

We enjoyed watching the birds at Peter's numerous bird feeders and, of course, more migrating raptors from his backyard. The most we saw at one time was a kettle of 14 Golden Eagles. Peter watched much longer than we did, as we had to head back home to B.C. For that day, Peter recorded 125 migrating raptors, which was the third highest count of the season: 101 Golden Eagles (97 adults, 4 subadults), 4 Bald Eagles (3 adults, 1 subadult), 4 Northern Harriers, 4 Sharp-shinned Hawks, 4 Northern Goshawks, 3 Red-tailed Hawks, 2 Rough-legged Hawks, 2 American Kestrels, and 1 Merlin.

We were very grateful for the hospitality of the local birders, especially Denise and Peter, and we would gladly return the favour if any of them visit our home turf.

Being birders, we all know what LBJs are (Little Brown Jobs, i.e., unidentified passerines such as immature sparrows). Well, I have to say that watching migrating eagles made me make up a new acronym—LBDs (Little Black Dots). Depending on how high the eagles are migrating and depending on the quality of your binoculars, the eagles are often LBDs. It really is essential to have a spotting scope to identify the migrating raptors and especially to age the eagles. And it sure helps to have a local expert or two with you!

Watching migrating eagles is addicting. Peter gave me the name of a keen eagle watcher in our backyard. So when we got home, I called up Vance Mattson.

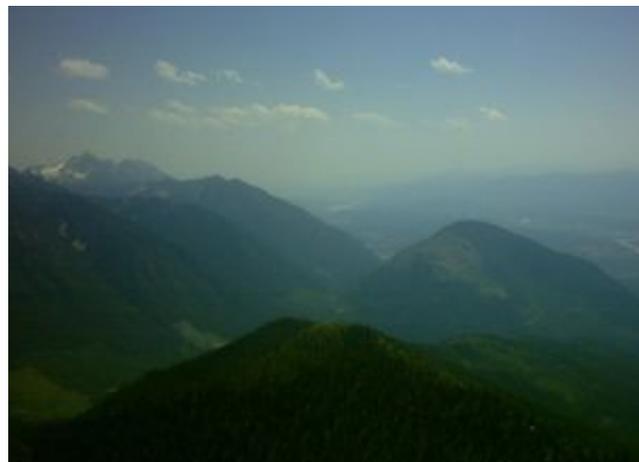
Vance became an eagle migration watcher in the Crowsnest Pass area and figured the eagles must be migrating near his hometown of Wasa along the west flanks of the Rocky Mountains. He's been counting them here for about seven years.

I went out eagle watching with him on March 29 at one of his favourite sites, very close to Sowerby Lake off of Lazy Lake Road in Wasa. Between 1230 and 1800, we saw 14 migrating eagles: eight Golden Eagles (7 adults and 1 subadult) and 6



the Eagle Path Heading South to Bill Nye [above Sowerby Lake]

-Vance



from Lakit Lookout South to Lone Peak and on to the Steeples

-Vance

migration of eagles.

Bald Eagles (5 adults and 1 juvenile). As for non-migrants, we saw 4 Bald Eagles (2 adults and 2 juveniles), 1 Red-tailed Hawk, and 1 Turkey Vulture.

Vance said the spring migration here generally has higher numbers than does the fall migration, and the numbers are considerably less than those in the Crowsnest Pass area. However, the benefits are that we can watch migrating eagles in our neighbourhood.

Stay tuned for a potential return trip to the Crowsnest Pass area for the dramatic fall

Bull River Ramble

March 28



bighorn sheep ewes

Despite the chilly, windy weather at the meeting place near the highway in the Staples parking lot, eight people set off for the Bull River. When we got out of the cars, ready to ramble, the wind wasn't too bad, and there were even some patches of blue sky.

As we crossed a field to the river, a group of bighorn sheep wandered by. We counted 35. On farther

there was a lone, unopened prairie crocus bud sticking up out of the hard soil, the first of the season for most of us. There was a

red-tailed hawk perched above the braided river in a spot with a good view of the territory below. We noted birds and plants on the way, including



aspen catkins



above the Bull River



Douglas-fir [background], aspens covered in catkins [middleground], human [foreground]



Red-tailed Hawk

many mountain bluebirds. We were able to come quite close to some, probably because they were focused on other things at that time of year.

photos by Greg

St. Eugene Ramble

April 12

On this windy Sunday morning a group of RMNats met to wander along the golf course and down by the St. Mary River. We looked at birds, other animals, plants and geological features, sharing our knowledge with each other as we rambled along. For a more detailed story along with many photographs, see www.rockymountainnaturalists.org/rmn-blog.



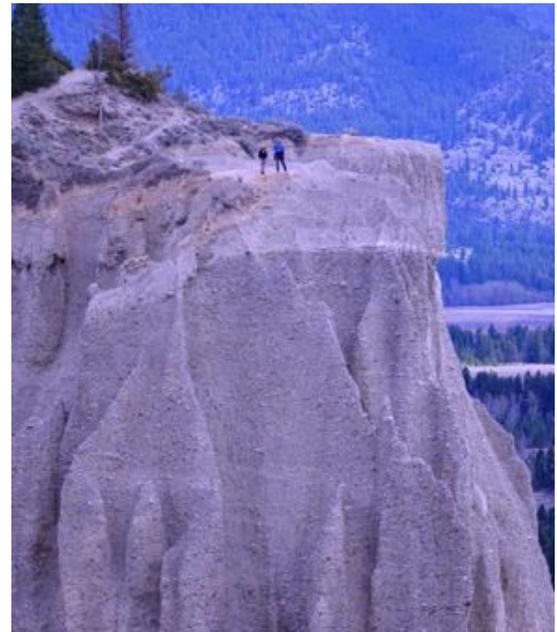
Stewart

Memorial Walks

April 18

Fifteen Rocky Mountain Naturalists took three walks in memory of three former members. First we hiked the three-km loop behind Wasa Campground. This is where Mildred White led her annual crocus viewing hike. Second we looked for waterfowl on Wasa Lake and on the sloughs as Anne Redfern liked to do. Third, in memory of Tony Wideski, we wandered across Bummer's Flats. During our three hikes we saw many species of plants and animals, which you can see listed at www.rockymountainnaturalists.org/rmn-blog.

April 26th, 2015, was a fine day for spring walks. This time, nats from Cherry Creek, Ta Ta Creek, Kimberley, Cranbrook and Fairmont converged on the margins of what was once Glacial Lake Invermere. Led by Daryl, we climbed from the Westside Road trailhead through a mixture of grasslands and woods up to what would have been the surface level of the 11,000 year old lake. Thanks to a wide spectrum of expertise within our group, we were able to anticipate and identify all manner of things animal, vegetable and mineral.



Peter

Sightings included Franklin’s Grouse, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Chipping Sparrow, Townsend’s Solitaire and White-throated Swift, along with evidence of Three-toed Woodpecker.



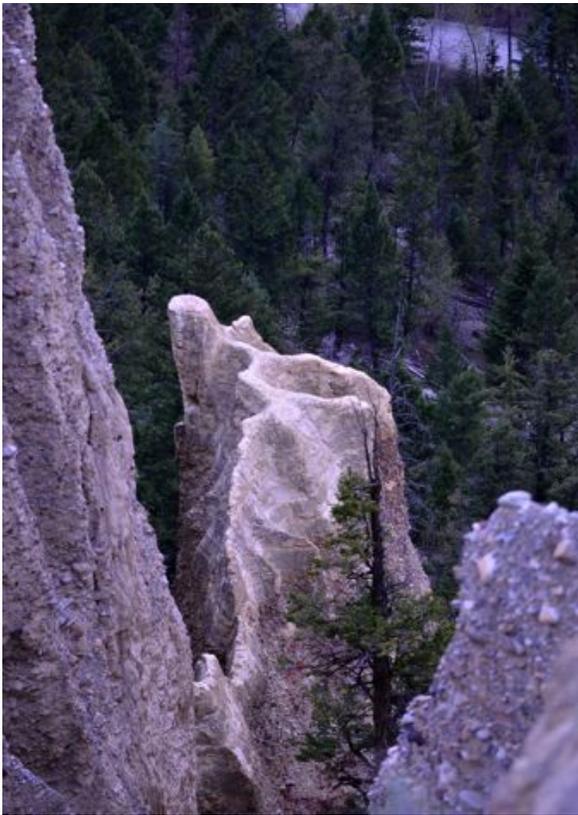
Franklin's Grouse

Peter

Flowering native plants added their color palette. Prairie crocus, narrow-leaved desert-parsley, balsamroot, puccoon and kinnikinnick were followed by fairybells, saskatoon and townsendia.

The hoodoos are a good example of several natural events. As the climate warmed following the Wisconsin Glacial Episode about 11,000 years ago, Glacial Lake Invermere eventually drained as the Rocky Mountain Trench ice melted. Dutch Creek, one of many active side drainages, had formed a gravelly delta at the ancient lake shoreline.

The creek then cut down through almost 100 meters of deposition as the lake level dropped. Evidently, the clay and silt contained some limey or calcareous material. When rainwater, which is slightly acidic due to carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, fell on



Peter

the deltaic gravel, a sort of concrete was the result. The cobbles which protrude from the steep walls not only represent many of the geologic formations through which Dutch creek has eroded in its upper watershed, but are brightly colored as well.

Following a short drive to the south along the west flank of Columbia Lake, the group wandered across a section of the alluvial fan formed by the Kootenay river. An interpretive trail developed by the community of Canal Flats provides easy walking access to the clear springs and small streams which converge to become the headwaters of the mighty Columbia River. Judging by the abundance of Ruby-crowned Kinglet



Peter

voices, the sprucey, brushy, hummocky lowlands provide excellent habitat for Canada's smallest songbirds. The Northern Harrier, Killdeer and Common



bird's-eye primrose

Lyle

Snipe also do well in these wetlands. It was not difficult to tune out a bit of highway noise and contemplate the 'discovery' of this unique river system by David Thompson and his expedition over 200 years ago. Sharp-eyed naturalists pounced on the opportunity to identify a tiny, pink-mauve flower. The bird's-eye primrose likes stream margins and wet, calcareous meadows; its delicately notched petals and dark, notched basal leaves added another reason why naturalists think everyone should watch where they step!

Submitted by Daryl Calder

Little Big Day

May 23

First of all, what is it?

It is a friendly birding competition among teams of birders with mixed abilities and experience.

Second, what is meant by the event's name?

Three members of the RMNats attended the "Okanagan Big Day Challenge" in Penticton in 1993, Greg Ross, Ruth Goodwin and Dean Nicholson. After enjoying such a great event the Rocky Mountain Naturalists decided to hold our own version, the "Little Big Day, Kootenay Style", and held our first event in 2006. The Okanagan Big Day still happens [<http://dickcannings.com/okanagan-big-day-challenge/>], but our Little Big Day is a lot more relaxed.

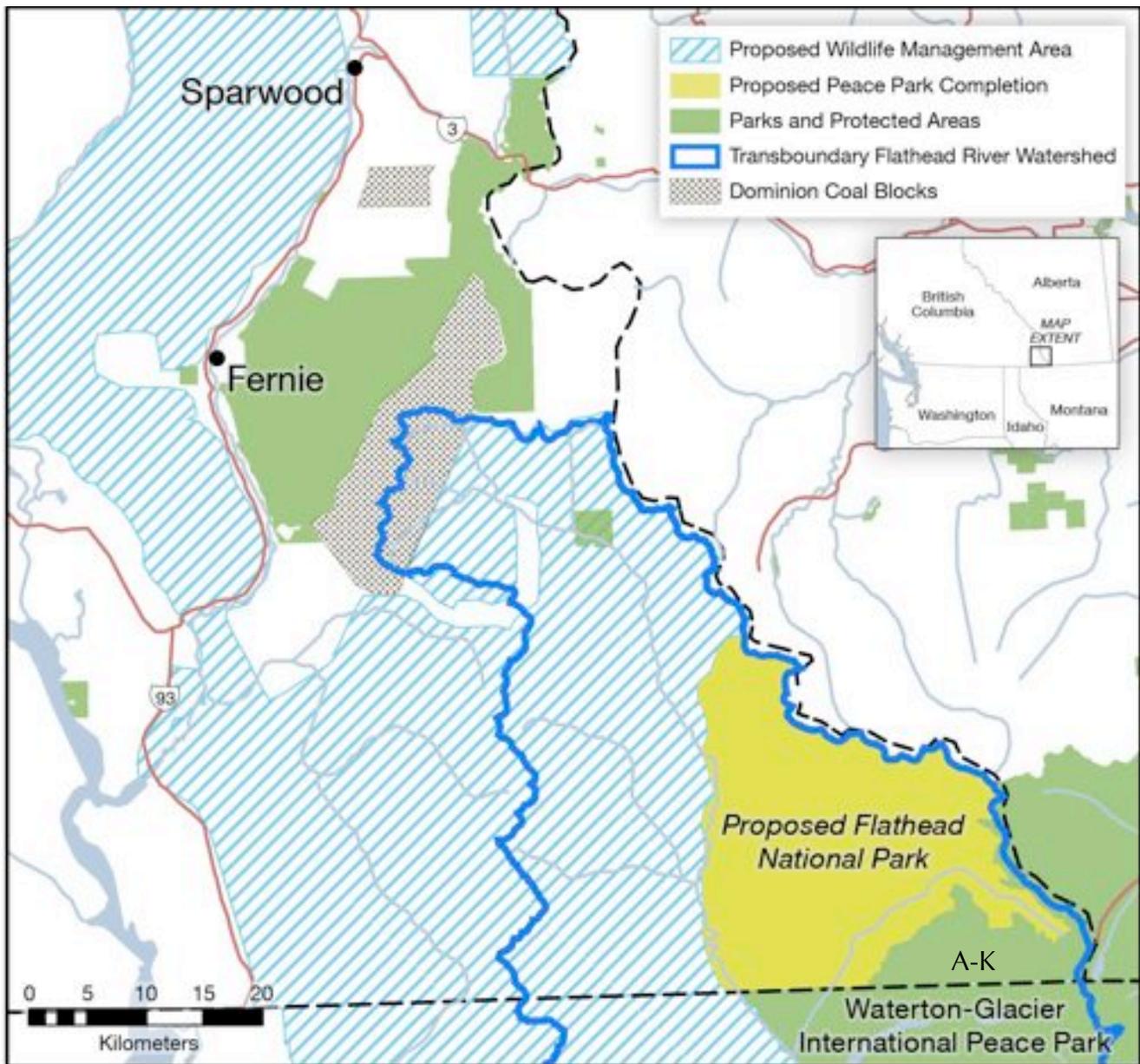
This year's Little Big Day took place on a recent Saturday. You can read about the friendly competition at <http://www.rockymountainnaturalists.org/>.

Wolverines, Waterton and the Flathead

Quoting from the Waterton-Glacier Guide, "Waterton Lakes National Park and Glacier National Park already share a boundary and three joint international designations: International Peace Park, Biosphere Reserve and World Heritage Site. Now the two parks are working on a fourth designation - International Dark Sky Reserve. This joint effort recognizes the very dark skies found at the two parks and makes a commitment to protecting and preserving these high quality conditions. Currently, two thirds of Americans cannot see the Milky Way from their back yard, and if current light pollution trends continue, there will be almost no dark skies left in the contiguous USA by 2025."

Local ranchers succeeded in having a Waterton Lakes National Park established in 1895. In 1932, Waterton and Glacier National Parks together were designated as the world's first International Peace Park. One glance at a map shows that there is an obvious section of land missing from the Peace Park; that being in the SE corner of British Columbia. This area is bounded by the Flathead River east to the continental divide and from Middlepass creek south to the border.

Waterton has over 250 species of birds, more than 60 species of mammals, 24 species of fish and eight species of reptiles and amphibians, not to mention an amazing array of plants. Many of these species use both sides of the border. In his book, *The Wolverine Way*, Douglas H. Chadwick tells of a wolverine winter study in Glacier in which he participated. These tough creatures are active all winter long, often climbing to the tops of mountains as they criss-cross their large territories. A necropsy on one revealed its stomach to be filled with ground-up bones. Would it not be reasonable to think that wolverines might cross the International Boundary?



map of the Flathead River Valley from sierraclub.bc.ca

The green area marked A-K is Akamina-Kishinena Provincial Park.

As for what to do about the Akamina-Kishinena Provincial Park, I submit that the best plan would be to incorporate it into the National Park. Otherwise, it would become an enclave where hunting is allowed, surrounded by the hunting reserve. Most publicly owned land is open to hunting, including every square meter of the three large wilderness parks in the East Kootenay. Establishing a national park in this portion of the Flathead River valley would still leave the majority of the crown land open for shooting mammals and birds. Creating a fine national park in approximately one third of the Canadian Flathead River valley is long overdue.

- Lloyd Hodge

Learn more about the campaign to keep the Flathead wild at <http://www.flathead.ca>.

Hike to the Big Tree

May 31



arrow-leaved balsamroot

Thirteen RMNats met at the college trail head on a Sunday afternoon. Our seven kilometre hike took us four hours, because we went at naturalist speed, and there was lots of interesting stuff to look at. We followed trails from the college parking lot up through some forest, across the old landfill, more forest, across the grassland between Alkali and Sylvan Lakes [looking at birds and plants as we went] then up through lots more forest until we were 160 m above where we started, at the Big Tree. The Big Tree is an old ponderosa pine [Peter estimates 600 years

old]. It is 4.33 meters in circumference, measured at 1.37 m above the ground. Lots of choke cherries were blooming up there, as well as balsamroot, penstemon and others.



blue-eyed-grass

We then took a trail northward to Mayook Lookout, where we had a beautiful view of the Purcell mountain range, the city of Cranbrook and the lakes and grassland of the community forest. As we made our way down through forests of different types we noted various plants,

including blue-eyed-grass [which is really a lily] and pine drops from years past, various birds and a colony of carpenter ants mining out a cut log. As we crossed the grassland on the north side of Sylvan Lake, ground squirrels chirped at us, a killdeer put on elaborate displays, we saw various waterfowl and shorebirds, we saw a garter snake, etc. On the way back through the woods to the starting point we saw a single prairie crocus bloom [at this late date] - perhaps the last of the season? Safe and sound back at the parking lot, we agreed that it had been a nice hike to the Big Tree.



There are carpenter ants in there, dropping wood chips onto the sawdust pile. Can you see them?



Big Tree



a big snag

photos by Joy Grassmick

Warbler Walk

June 6

The RMNats who walked with Peter didn't see many warblers, but there were lots of other birds.



Eastern Kingbird



Clay-coloured Sparrow



Lazuli Bunting



Western Kingbird



Western Kingbird



Mourning Dove

Club Camp

June 9 - 11



The Rocky Mountain Naturalists held the annual Club Camp at the Bull River Resort this spring. The camp was attended by 18 people, 6 using the very deluxe cabin accommodation, 7 in trailers and 4 in tents. Besides the Rocky Mountain Naturalists we had two guests from the Fernie Nature Club and one from Nelson that belongs to BC Nature as an individual member. During the stay we had two community meals, one a BBQ the other a potluck, both held in the large covered BBQ area.

We started the camp with a walk along the Bull River to the old original dam site, led by Helga.





We enjoyed early morning birding on both mornings, one around the Bull River Lodge, the highlights being dozens of hummingbirds which included all three species that we get here, the Rufous, the Black-chinned and the Calliope. We also saw a Lewis's Woodpecker and a big brown Black Bear. On the second morning we went down the road and birded on the grassy flats on the Douglas Lake Ranch.

Ruth led a great hike up to Mirror Lake, exploring the many wildflowers and bird

species along the way. Then in the afternoon a little warmer walk along the northern edge of the Pickering hills.

On the way out on the last day some stopped at the bridge to overlook the Bull River Canyon and the Aberfeldie Dam.

article and photos by Greg Ross



Top of the World

June 14



meadow rue

Eleven people travelled a long way to Top of the World Provincial Park. When we got out of the cars we hiked seven kilometers to Fish Lake, observing birds, other animals and plants [some of which are pictured here] along the way. At Fish Lake we looked at majestic mountains and waterfalls. Then the rain started pouring down. We ate our lunches inside a cabin, and the rain tapered off enough for us to enjoy some poking around Fish Lake before the hike back [during which the sun actually came out].



twayblade



globeflower



baneberry

photographs by Margaret

Wild Turkeys



the big boys strutting their stuff

This is what wild turkeys do in the spring of the year - late winter, to be precise. These photos were taken by Lyle Grisedale on March 13, after the snow was gone but before the grass greened up.



It's a face-off!

Club Information

Executive

President	George Rogers
Vice President	Virginia Rasch
Secretary	Marianne Nahm
Treasurer	Linda Hastings
BC Nature Director	Greg Ross
Field Trips	Paula Rogers

Other Committee and Club Representatives

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

Field Trips

Leader responsibilities:

Find a replacement leader if necessary.

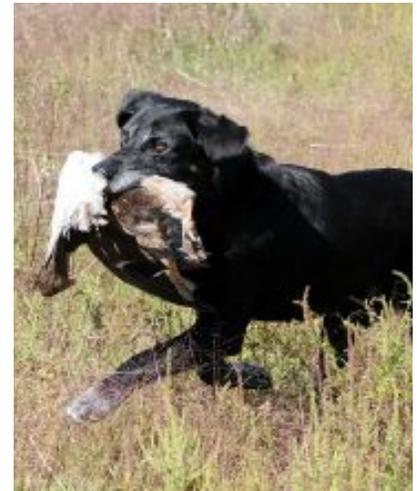
Keep the group together.

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



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

Upcoming Events

June 24 9:00 am, McClure Road parking lot - Potato Butte hike

If you would like to schedule an event for the club, please email the field trip coordinator.

Watch your email for future event announcements, and please reply.

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

July 15 Wednesday 7 pm Reade Lake meeting and birdwatching