

The Kestrel

Quarterly Newsletter of the
Rocky Mountain Naturalists
2016 summer solstice



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

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Observing Our Night Sky

March 18

On March 18, 2016, dressed in warm clothes, about 18 keen hikers struck out for Potato Butte on a spring evening to see the night sky. They began the hike uphill anticipating a glorious sunset and moonrise. The sky was partially cloudy, and the group hoped for a clear night illuminated by a first quarter moon. Many hikers carried heavy loads for their night sky viewing, astronomy and lunar observations.



To the east, the Rockies sparkled white under new snow. In the west, clouds formed in high elevation cirrus streamers - an indication of a weather change. As evening advanced, a small herd of Rocky Mountain Elk emerged from the forest and spread out over the grassland of Wycliffe.

Amateur astronomer Jamie Levine lugged his small telescope up the 1.5 km trail to the summit. Greg Ross carried his spotting scope, tripod and camera while Daryl Calder carried his spotting scope and hauled a portable propane campfire.



The sunset was drab orange, but the sky remained clear, and as the evening lengthened the more than half-full moon rose in bright white radiance. The gibbous moon reflected enough light to walk around the rocky summit of Potato Butte without flashlights. The portable campfire gave nice warmth and lit up the hikers resting in chairs around it.

Throughout the evening Jamie used his telescope to track the moon as it rose up in the sky and to show Jupiter with its string of four moons which looked like sparkling diamonds. As more stars showed up in the dark sky, Dan Hicks explained the visible astronomical features, such as the location of various constellations, and the distances (in light-years) that earth is from some of the brighter objects.

About eleven o'clock the wind increased, bringing cold air from the high mountains of the western Purcells, and temperatures dropped. People gradually packed up and headed back down the trail. It was an evening to remember.



submitted by Janice Strong
photos by Janice Strong and Jamie Levine

Eagle Migration and Raptor Watching

March 19

Nineteen Rocky Mountain Naturalists enjoyed beautiful weather conditions and relatively good eagle migration at a site east of Wasa. A total of 60 migrants flew past between 12:30 and 19:00, consisting of 44 adult golden eagles, 14 bald eagles, the season's first sharp-shinned hawk and a turkey vulture. Migration was relatively consistent throughout the period, with peak movement occurring between 15:00 and 17:00 (29 birds). In addition to migrants, 16 non-migrant bald eagles were seen throughout the period, often moving south, and three golden eagles, one of which delighted naturalists with a courtship flight. Later, four adult bald eagles soared low over the Scarface site along with two resident Red-tailed Hawks.



spring raptor watching

Paula

Vance Mattson has provided a summary of this year's reconnaissance count from March 1 to April 10, consisting of 26 days and 130 hours of observation.

Golden Eagle	230
Bald Eagle	110
Red-tailed Hawk	6
Rough-legged Hawk	1
Northern Goshawk	3
Sharp-shinned Hawk	2
Northern Harrier	1
Turkey Vulture	2
Unidentified Eagles	2



golden eagle Vance

Thanks again to Vance, Virginia and Helga. We look forward to the excitement of the fall migration beginning late August. Please check the RMERF site (Rocky Mountain Eagle Research Foundation).
Daryl Calder

Spring on the Buttes

April 9

Saturday morning, April 9th, could not have been more perfect for a hike on Potato and Lone Pine Buttes in Wycliffe. We had clear skies and little wind as we enjoyed the many wildflowers blooming along the trail. I had walked our route a few days earlier and was amazed at the new growth in just a few sunny days! Sixteen members of our club and one visitor enjoyed the many crocus, mertensia, parsleys, spring beauty, woodland star and shooting star. It really was glorious! I don't think I have ever seen so many of the "sunflowers" [balsamroot] blooming so early in April. The puccoon, cut-leaf



Red-tailed Hawk



prairie crocus

did return to the vehicles in five hours. I left Gerry looking for his car keys, but Bruce and Charlene were available to give him and Lloyd a ride into Cranbrook if the keys were not found.

daisy, larkspur and lupine were coming along. For me, the fern-leaved parsley was the best plant of the day as I don't often see it flowering.

With this large group, listening to birds was more challenging, but we did see a Red-tailed Hawk, Western Meadowlarks, and Western and Mountain Bluebirds.

My challenge as leader was trying to keep an eye on this group! Some were faster and some were slower. Thanks to Greg for staying with the slower group as they dawdled their way up to the top of Lone Pine. I think Greg gave them a good class on plant identification! My group



shooting star

Ruth Goodwin

web photos

Balancing Rock Hike

April 30



It was the last day in April, 2016, when Daryl Calder led us on a gem of a hike up the Balancing Rock Trail a few kilometers west of Creston, at the base of the hill just above the waterfowl sanctuary. It's about a two to three hour hike, quite steep, and we had to spot vehicles at each end because the hike begins near the sanctuary above the flats but ends near the first bridge crossing over Summit Creek on the Salmo-Creston Highway. But what a diversity of flowers, trees and birds along the way! Initially it's quite steep and open with great views of the lush, green flatlands

below; the jagged Skimmerhorn Range to the east and the Purcells to the south. Even though it was early in the season, there were already common red paintbrush and shooting star growing beside the trail, saskatoon in full bloom and a host of other spring wildflowers of many colors. After about 500 feet of climbing we got to the famous "balancing rock," a big chunk of granite about the size of a garage that appeared to be a glacial erratic left by the last ice age. The trail levelled out briefly on top and then we started down a steep hill again and quickly descended into a shady old growth forest of Douglas-fir, western white pine, ponderosa pine, western red cedar, grand fir, larch, aspen, willow and an understory of western



skunk cabbage

hemlock. We even saw a calypso orchid along with other moisture loving wildflowers. But the best part of the hike occurred when we encountered a narrow piece of wet, green flatland with a small babbling brook. It was covered with skunk cabbage, or "swamp lantern," with the largest leaves

I've ever seen in the Kootenays. The leaves stood out so verdantly green against the shady background that it looked almost tropical - like the Florida Everglades. No kidding. After we left the skunk cabbage swamp, we descended another steep, shady slope to Summit Creek and Highway 3 where our vehicles awaited. We also saw and heard a great variety of birds along the Duck Lake Dike, including a Great Blue Heron, Osprey, Wood Duck and many others, but you'll have to ask Daryl for the other species. Then to top off a wonderful day, we stopped in at Sutcliffe Farm on the flats on the way back and bought some of the tastiest asparagus I've ever eaten.



story and photos by Gerry Warner

Memorial Walks

May 1

Fourteen of us enjoyed a beautiful spring morning in the Wasa area. We started up the trail behind the campground and enjoyed star-flowered false Solomon's-seal and fairybells in abundance along with the shrubs Oregon grape, saskatoon, and bitterbrush in bloom. As on many sunny slopes, the balsamroot was staging a wonderful show. Both narrow-leaved desert-parsley and large-fruited desert-parsley were flowering as were phlox and puccoon. As we meandered the ridge, we saw two swans flying above Wasa Lake and a couple of Turkey Vultures as well. Some of us commented that the songbirds in the woods along the trail were notably silent. A few we did hear singing were the Townsend's Solitaire, Vesper Sparrow, and Pine Siskin. After this two hour stroll, we headed down to check out the birds and ducks at Wasa Lake and slough. While at the lake we had some discussion as to whether a bird calling for her mate (which did show up for a short moment) was a Merlin or a Sharp-shinned Hawk. After looking in the bird guides on hand it was decided it was in fact a Sharpie. Meadow Lark, Killdeer and a Bald Eagle were also spotted at this stop. Further down the road we stopped at Bummers



Flats for a short walk down to the Kootenay River. Here we paid our respects to our past club members. At this time of year the river has swollen a bit with the runoff from the mountain snow hidden in the valley.

Ruth Goodwin and George Rogers
photos by Ruth

Hoodoos and Headwaters

May 7

On Saturday, May 7th, a naturalist trip to the Columbia Lake area coincided with fine, sunny weather. In the morning, twelve of us walked the approximately 6 km loop through the benchlands north and west of lower Dutch Creek. Many landforms were shaped by 'recent' continental glaciation, about 11,000 years ago, including Glacial Lake Invermere. Just north of Skookumchuck and near Donald, natural earth dams and ice blocked the Rocky Mountain Trench, allowing the big lake to form. As the climate warmed, many energetic side creeks brought alluvium from the Purcell Mountains, depositing it along the west shore of the lake. The water level eventually dropped about 90 meters, and Dutch Creek carved its way down through the unconsolidated material. The result is a line of clayey, gravelly cliffs featuring many narrow side canyons and pillars known as hoodoos. Dutch Creek alluvium, deposited in the valley bottom of the Rocky Mountain Trench, holds back the waters of Columbia Lake from draining more quickly to the north.



looking west, up Dutch Creek Glenda

In addition to the wonderful view of Columbia Lake, the area provides a rain shadow microclimate which supports some unusual flowering plants and a forest/grassland mix. Evidently, some birds have discovered that crevices in the cliffs provide suitable shelter and nesting habitat. The very attractive White-throated Swift, a hummingbird relative, breeds here, delighting us with its aerobatics and unique call. The swifts and three varieties of swallow flew continuously along the cliff face. Other birds, uniquely suited to the ecological niches found here, included Vesper Sparrow, Townsend's Solitaire and Dusky Flycatcher.



hoodoos

Glenda

pausing to discuss various aspects of the forest, grassland and geography. Logically, there was no disagreement when an ice cream break was suggested.

By mid day it became so warm that we chose shady spots when



headwaters

Glenda

Next, we drove south, the entire length of Columbia Lake, following good signage along the outskirts of Canal Flats, and parked on the edge of the old airstrip. To the north, we could see the Hoodoos in the distance, and to the east we noticed the break in the Rocky Mountains which allows the Kootenay River to flow into the Trench. The Kootenay River alluvium has formed a typically flattened cone or fan, and most of the water slides down the southerly edge of the fan, continuing south into Montana. Some of the water finds its way through gravel seams within the fan. Because the Kootenay is three or four meters higher than Columbia Lake, ground water emerges in a series of cool, clear springs, forming a shallow, meandering stream flowing into

Columbia Lake. Here, the Village of Canal Flats constructed a fine walking trail, bridge and interpretive signage several years ago.

The Headwaters of the Columbia is unique because the Columbia and Kootenay Rivers rejoin in Castlegar, BC, before entering Washington State. The 2000 km long Columbia River then continues south and east, joining its major tributary, the Snake River, and then turns and flows west to its mouth at Astoria, Oregon.

Walking through the hummocky, brushy woodland, we recalled the amazing adventures of David Thompson as he surveyed a route from Hudson’s Bay to the Pacific Ocean 200 years ago. Many years later, a European adventurer, William Adolph Baillie-Grohman, pursued a dream of enriching the fertile lands of Kootenay Flats at present-day Creston.

Ruby-crowned Kinglets and Orange-crowned Warblers sang and flitted, while birds-eye primrose accented the wild serenity.

Daryl Calder

Star Party

May 7

A small party of RMNats went to a meadow near the Wycliffe rodeo site to look at the night sky. As we arrived, the narrow sliver of the new crescent moon was just setting [photograph at <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/listeners-lens-1.3302734>]. On the horizon, its diameter looked huge, although only a sliver was showing. Jupiter was up there, and we could see all four of its biggest moons through someone’s spotting scope. As twilight turned to night, a display of aurora appeared. It was only white, but it was really dancing at times.

Turtle Day

April 25



Greg Ross shows classes of eager Cranbrook students how he counts and monitors the nests of Western Painted Turtles at of Elizabeth Lake

On April 25th the The Fish and Wildlife Compensation Program (FWCP), together with the Rocky Mountain Naturalists, with support from BC Hydro, the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations, and the Columbia Basin Environmental Education Network, invited school classes in the morning and the public in the afternoon to Elizabeth Lake (Visitor Centre) to learn more about Western Painted Turtles.



Angus with a hatchling

Over 400 people came to learn.

We talked to biologists and other naturalists to discover how this amazing creature has evolved and survives the winter under the sand. We learned of its

life cycle, saw displays and had a chance to be up close and personal with the Western Painted Turtle! We even got to see the young baby turtles just hours out of their nests!

“The Western Painted Turtle is the only freshwater turtle native to B.C., and has developed some extraordinary adaptations to survive





Students found a variety of aquatic pond life.

at the northern end of its distribution range in North America," says FWCP Columbia Region Manager Crystal Klym. "It's a Blue-listed (vulnerable) species in the province, so we should make sure we do everything we can make sure that the Elizabeth Lake population remains sustainable."

The FWCP and the Rocky Mountain Naturalists have been working together to monitor and protect the turtles at Elizabeth Lake for many years. "One interesting observation is that hatchlings from 11 of the 58 nests laid last June actually emerged in

the fall of last year," said Greg Ross who is monitoring the nests for the Rocky Mountain Naturalists. "Typically one or two emerge before winter, but never this many. It may be due to changing environmental conditions but we cannot say for certain."

Greg Ross

photographs by Stewart

Little Big Day

May 14

A beautiful, sunny, warm day for everyone. This year our lowest temperature at 6 am was 3°, soaring up to 23° in the afternoon.

We enjoyed our meal and count-up at The Heid Out in Cranbrook as great bird stories fluttered about.

Four teams took part, raising \$105.00 to be donated to an environmental cause in the Kootenays.



scanning the reservoir Helga



Western Wood Pewee Helga

The total number of species seen by all of the teams was 144, compared to last year's 140.

The winning team, Cooper's Hawks [Dianne, Dean, and Joe], found 119 species, followed by the Crane-necked Out-of-timers with 92 species. Special note to the Pedal and Paddle team for their environmental endeavor as well as observing 80 species, and The Tea Party for their stories of their actual bush tea party, good china and all, and having 74 species.

Congratulations to everyone!

Cooper's Hawks
Dianne, Dean and Joe
Spotted 119 species

Crane-necked Out-of-timers
Greg, Sue, Glenda and Helga
Spotted 92 species

Pedal and Paddle
Ruth, Kent, Karen, Tara, Jim and Laura
Spotted 80 species

The Tea Party
Cathy, Audrey and Andrea
Spotted 74 species



the winning team Greg

Greg Ross

Idlewild Lake

I attended the City-sponsored meeting on Idlewild Lake recently and here's a short report. About 15 attended the meeting, including representatives of the Boys and Girls Club, Joseph Creek Streamkeepers, Fly Fishers Club, Urban Systems, COTR, the noon Rotary Club and others.

The City's plan is to build a new concrete spillway inside the existing dam to greatly increase the water outflow capacity and make the dam more secure. This will cost around \$2.2 million, while another \$500,000 will be spent on upgrading the park and dredging the lake to increase its capacity.

Another public meeting will be held in September or October to discuss the City's master plan for the park based on the submissions from the public and City staff. New options suggested at this meeting included upgrading the fishing platforms, installing wildlife viewing platforms, constructing a fitness circuit, improving the children's play area and moving the turtles out of the lake to a better location once one was found.

It was agreed that the park should be kept natural as much as possible with an emphasis on preserving nature and improving the park's amenities. Re-introducing native plant species was suggested, and also linking the park with other natural areas in the city. Motorized recreation should continue to be banned in the park, and there should be no more new pavement. Water quality should also be preserved.

Gerry Warner

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

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

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

Astronomy

https://www.google.ca/search?q=orion+and+pyramids+of+giza&rlz=1T4ADRA_enCA378CA379&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwj7t56Q8c_LAhVPwWMKHdgcDXMQsAQIJQ&biw=1600&bih=697#imgrc=EEQyErX2EF2G_M%3A

<http://earthsky.org/tonight>
heavens-above.com

https://www.google.ca/search?q=orion+and+pyramids+of+giza&rlz=1T4ADRA_enCA378CA379&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwj7t56Q8c_LAhVPwWMKHdgcDXMQsAQIJQ&biw=1600&bih=697#imgrc=EEQyErX2EF2G_M%3A

May 7 moonset

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/listeners-lens-1.3302734>

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



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.

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

Wednesdays - Elizabeth Lake Early Morning Birding will commence at 7 AM. Meet at the corner parking lot of 11th St and Innes Avenue, below Parkland School.

Saturday, August 13, 2016 - 2:00 pm - RMN Annual Summer BBQ
canoe, kayaks, life jackets, volleyball available all day; supper - 5:30 ish
Bring your own meat to bbq, your own beverage, a potluck contribution [appies, salad or dessert].

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

July 20 - to be held outdoors at Reade Lake – Wallach Property