

The Kestrel

Quarterly Newsletter of the
Rocky Mountain Naturalists
2022 winter solstice



Lyle Grisedale

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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 at rmnatskestrel@gmail.com.



President Marianne presenting John with a Juniper spoon in appreciation of his presentation

The RMNs held an outdoor meeting tonight at Idlewild Park. John Brace, a forester with the Ktunaxa, was our guest speaker, and talked about what a prescribed burn is, and what the expected benefits will be. These include removing the threat of natural combustible materials which have built up on the forest floor over the past 70-100 years with successive provincial governments' policies of fire suppression; protecting human life and property; and encouraging habitat

restoration and biodiversity.

This link (<https://stories.ourtrust.org/reviving-an-ecosystem-with-ancestral-techniques/>) leads to information about John Brace's presentation. It covers the work he is involved in with the Ktunaxa.

photos and story by Stewart Wilson



Paddle on the Kootenay River

September 25

To celebrate B.C. Rivers Day, several naturalists put in two canoes and seven kayaks at Bummers Flats and paddled upstream on the Kootenay River for five kilometres to the remains of the Bechtel Ferry dock. In the 1940s the ferry was used to get from Cherry Creek across to North Bummers Flats. As we travelled up the river we could see pilings in the river on both sides. Many species of birds were seen such as large flocks of robins (21) and Red-winged Blackbirds (25). We saw Belted Kingfishers, Cedar Waxwings, Hairy and Pileated Woodpeckers and one Sharp-shinned Hawk. A black bear was spotted along the riverbank about midway up to the old ferry dock. We took the boats out shortly after passing the remains of the Bechtel Ferry dock, our destination for a wiener roast.



Rocke Robertson



Rocke Robertson

Daryl started the fire for our wiener roast while several paddlers stretched their legs by walking to the old Bechtel homestead. The homestead has a lovely view of the Kootenay River and the Rockies. The old house is caved in, but an old log barn with its roof gone is still standing. We ate crabapples from an old tree alongside a small creek that runs through the property.

Charles Bechtel was a retired bachelor, living



Sandy McArthur

landing spot on the Kootenay River for a weiner roast and a walk to the old Bechtel homestead

alone just above the ferry dock and running the ferry. In the 1940s there was a wagon road that ran along the west side of the Kootenay River to the ferry dock. The



Marianne Nahm

exploring site of the 1945 Bechtel Ferry shootout
We found remnants of the old barn, some rusty artifacts and a crabapple tree still producing apples.



Rocke Robertson

walking to the Bechtel homestead

ferry crossed the river to Bummers Flats.

In 1945 the Kimberley police received a complaint about Bechtel threatening Frank Biddlecombe with an axe. He felt Bechtel was "dangerously insane". From August 18th to the 22nd police tried to get Bechtel to come out of his barricaded



Sandy McArthur

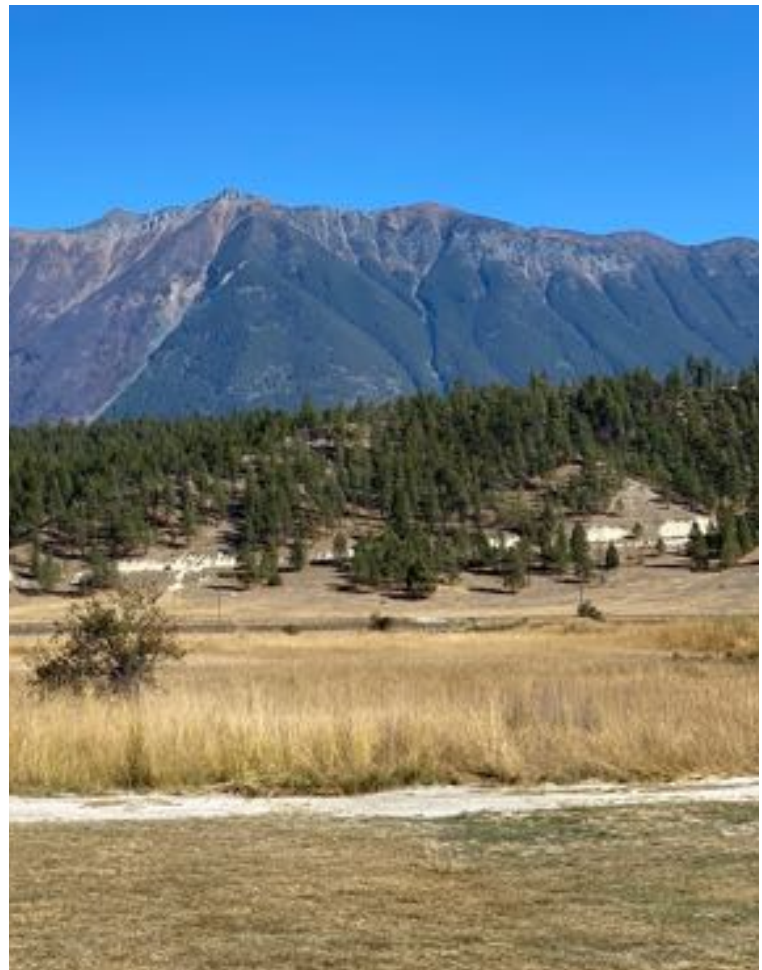
old log barn on the Bechtel homestead

cabin where he was having hallucinations and threatening to use his gun on the police. After tear gas was thrown into the cabin, Bechtel ran out and hid in the bush for days. Bechtel was later found barricaded in his barn. When tear gas was thrown into the barn to get him out, Bechtel fired three shots, with the third shot striking Corporal Slater, discharging Slater's revolver and causing a wound to Slater's left side. To retrieve Slater in order to drive him to the hospital, several shots were fired into the barn. A

guard was placed, and the following day Bechtel finally came out unarmed, suffering from a gunshot wound. Bechtel succumbed to his injuries the following day. This shootout was an attempt by the police to help a man with mental issues that went seriously wrong. [See <https://www.kimberleybulletin.com/community/the-shootout-at-the-bechtel-ferry-1945/> for the *Kimberley Bulletin* account of the episode.]

After our walk to the Bechtel homestead and our wiener roast, we headed downstream. The return paddle was shorter than the outgoing trip by half an hour since we were not paddling against the slow but steady current. The weather was perfect for a paddle on the Kootenay River to celebrate B.C. Rivers Day.

Sandy McArthur



Rocke Robertson

Moe's Canyon Hike

October 8

A warm, somewhat hazy Saturday morning found a group of Naturalists heading towards Moe's Canyon, which is a very interesting trail in the Kimberley Nature Park. We started, from the Nordic Ski Club parking area, on the Magic Line Trail only to find that it was under construction for the new initiative which will enable e-assist bikes and riders who use adaptive bikes to be able to easily access some riding terrain. Judy Brunner, our capable leader, who has spent many years exploring the ski hill, led us off the very dusty "construction in progress" trail to guide us through the bush to the start of the Moe's Canyon Trail just to the south edge of the downhill ski trails.

From the north, Moe's Canyon is a quiet, shady trail at the base of impressive rocky terrain which leads to an area of very large diameter and tall, impressive Western larch (*Larix occidentalis*). The larch in the area were beginning to change from green to their golden fall colour. There are also many stands of subalpine larch (*Larix lyallii*) in the KNP and the East Kootenay.

Western larch, a deciduous conifer native to the mountains of western North America, can grow up to 80 metres tall with a trunk diameter of up to 1.5 metres. The larch's thick bark and non-flammable needles make it fire resistant. Larch snags are very important for cavity nesting birds and homes for small mammals. Seeds in their relatively small cones provide food for Pine Siskins, Redpolls and White-winged Crossbills.

Some Indigenous people collected and ate the cambium and sap of the larch. The



a big larch

resinous gum helped treat sore throats and injuries. A tea made from young, green shoots treated laryngitis and tuberculosis. Larch wood is prized for building material and firewood. Of course, in the Kootenays, we love the fall scenes when our valley hillsides and alpine areas turn golden.

After admiring the large larch in the canyon, Judy led us to an open area with a bench where we enjoyed lunch and conversation before returning to the Nordic Centre parking area via Spruce Trail.

photos and story by Marianne Nahm



among the larches

Drop of Doom Outing

October 27

A group of hardy Naturalists braved a very brisk wind to meander along the escarpment above the St. Mary River. Leading up to the trail along the escarpment we climbed a golden sand dune that had been blasted by the wind, creating intricate

wave like shapes in the sand.

Beautiful



views across the river valley showed golden Western larches gathered here and there amongst the ponderosa and lodgepole pine and Douglas-fir trees. Large hoodoos in various shapes and sizes marched along the edge of the escarpment below us while ravens entertained us with their antics playing in the wind.

The Drop of Doom (also known as the Crack) is a local name. A large section of the escarpment has fallen away from



the edge, dropping approximately 3 to 5 metres in places. Every year the ground drops a bit more, and the fallen area extends further along the escarpment edge. A very informative presentation was given by Doug Leach, a Naturalist member and geologist. His excellent article is set out below.

A loop through a winding path amongst the trees and along an old roadway brought us back to the start of our journey.

Paula Rogers, story and photos

Slope Failure Along the St. Mary River

The slumping along the St. Mary River is the result of the river undercutting the river bank. The river bank is composed of soft, non-lithified Pleistocene glacial till, sands and silts that are easily eroded by water.

The outside of a meander (curve) is a high energy environment where the river is cutting the edge of the bank and carrying the sediment away. The inside of the meander is a low energy environment where sediments are being deposited by the river. As the river bank is being undercut by the river, the overlying sediments lose their support and slump into the river. As these sediments fall into the river, the water carries them away and deposits the sediment farther downstream.

A river valley is not static and will always be changing its shape due to erosion. This is an ongoing process that has occurred in the past, will continue to happen in the future and has formed the present day configuration of the St. Mary River valley. A good example of a meander where the river will eventually cut a new channel and cease flowing in the old channel, resulting in the formation of an oxbow lake, can be viewed beside the Kimberley campground.

Slope erosion has resulted in many catastrophes because people like to build their houses at the edges of high cliffs where there are good views. This occurred in the Edmonton area along the edge of the deeply cut North Saskatchewan River and will happen in the future along the St. Mary River. In Edmonton the homeowners attempted to place the blame on the City of Edmonton and sued to recover the costs of their houses that were floating down the river. To counter this many municipalities are now zoning such cliff edge areas to prevent people from building on these



Joyce Moore



Joyce Moore

high risk sites in order to avoid possible future litigation.

Doug Leach

Elizabeth Lake Restoration Project Update

In May, along with Keefer Ecological Services employees, Rocky Mountain Naturalist volunteers planted 4500 native shrubs and sedges. Shrub species included red osier dogwood; mountain alder; wild roses; water birch; and Scouler's, sandbar and Pacific willows. We were thankful to have cool, damp weather during and after this planting time, giving the shrubs and sedges time to adapt from the nursery to the windy, harsher conditions at Elizabeth Lake. Protective fencing was placed around each planted polygon.



Marianne Nahm

some of the shrubs



Marianne

watering

Volunteers adopted one or more fenced areas that were not low-lying, watering on a regular basis by bucketing



Marianne

watering



Marianne Nahm

watering with lake water

the water from the lake to pour around each shrub. Access to water became more challenging when there was little to



Stewart Wilson

hard work, but easier than hauling buckets of water from the lake

no precipitation and the lake level dropped. Naturalists are resourceful and hard-working, so many brought water from home in large containers or walked long distances with full buckets to keep the shrubs alive.

In September, Keefer Ecological



Stewart

water from the water truck



Daryl Calder

vole guards

hired a water truck. Volunteers used it to give polygons that had not been watered previously a good soaking before dormancy set in.

There was concern about the amount of grass that had grown around the perimeters of the polygons and around the guilds [associations of plants] within this fencing. In winter, voles can girdle shrubs and small trees, eating the cambium while using the grass as protective cover from predators. Again, volunteers joined Keefer staff to place 400 plastic cylinders around some of the shrubs to protect them from voles. Copious amounts of bark mulch were added to each guild. George and Rachel of Elizabeth Lake Lodge generously provided a number of hours of staff time for five employees to help

out with this project. Grass was also trimmed both inside and outside some fenced areas. Our early snowfall and cooler temperatures, compared to last year's, quickly put the shrubs and sedges into dormancy.

Our Club volunteers and community donors have been instrumental in getting the first year of the 5 year Elizabeth Lake Restoration Project off to a strong, positive start. Thank you for all your energy and dedication.

Marianne Nahm



Marianne Nahm

2022 volunteer wrap-up potluck

Bummers Flats Pollinator Restoration Project



In the Fall issue of *the Kestrel* Marianne wrote about several Rocky Mountain Naturalists helping to collect native plant seeds for a restoration project on an old levee in the Bummers Flats region just north of Fort Steele. The project, now in its second year, is led by Brenda Beckwith and Valerie Huff of KinSeed



Ecologies (based in Nelson) with Ella Both of the Ministry of Land, Water and Resource Stewardship coordinating a large group of volunteers from several organizations. A third seed-collecting day had taken place on Monday September 19. On October 5 volunteers had the chance to visit the restoration site for the first time and to participate in putting to use the seeds collected earlier.

The levee had been overtaken by invasive plants, notably spotted and Russian

knapweeds which had been very difficult to control even with repeated herbicide applications. The goal of this project is to outcompete the invasives with a diverse native plant community that supports a wide range of native pollinators. We could see the progress made following last year's restoration work of removing invasives and introducing a first round of natives which were now flourishing. Of special interest was the blue-listed wild licorice plant (*Glycyrrhiza lepidota*) which is a favoured plant for the red-listed silver-spotted skipper butterfly (*Epargyreus clarus californicus*) which was seen here last summer. This year we filled spaces throughout the area with young plants (grown by KinSeed Ecologies), watered them, and then scattered the area with a mixture of seeds.



A proposal has been written for a third year of restoration work, for which the Rocky Mountain Naturalists have written a letter of support. If it is successful, look out for opportunities next year to learn more about native plants and to help collect their seeds.



Hilary Anderson

photographs by
Marianne Nahm

Jaffray-Wardner Christmas Bird Count

December 15

The second Jaffray-Wardner Christmas Bird Count took place on December 15 with 14 participants and 2 feeder watchers. Temperatures were in the



Bob Whetham

Downy Woodpecker



Marianne Nahm

cool trio at the trout hatchery

-4° C to -6° C range with overcast skies and only light winds. These conditions were favourable for both birds and birders. There

was light traffic on the secondary roads which also favoured listening and walking. Our compiler for



Bob

Ruffed Grouse



Lyle Grisedale

Pygmy Owl



Gretchen and Bob Whetham

this count is Emma Bourassa who will now be busy entering data from the four quadrants and two feeder watchers. Thank you to Emma and all our keen participants.

Daryl Calder



Bob

American Robin

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

Reviving a forest ecosystem stories.ourtrust.org/reviving-an-ecosystem-with-ancestral-techniques/

Bechtel Ferry shootout kimberleybulletin.com/community/the-shootout-at-the-bechtel-ferry-1945/

Bird Observations <https://ebird.org>

Cranbrook Community Forest <https://www.cranbrookcommunityforest.com/>

About Field Trips

Leaders:

Radios and first aid kits are available from Paula.

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 to rmnatskestrel@gmail.com, along with pictures, as soon as possible.

At present, the Club is not facilitating carpooling. Group size will be limited to 10-12.

Our non-COVID practice is below.

Carpoolers: Please offer to chip in for gas. On a round trip with a driving time of under an hour the compensation should be \$5.00, and on a round trip with a driving time of an hour or more the compensation should be \$10.00.

No dogs on field trips, please

Events and Activities

These are the events planned at the present time. Watch your inbox for notices of events and activities, or check the calendar on the website.

Early Morning Birding

Wednesday mornings

See RMN Calendar on our website.

Christmas Bird Counts – Creston – Dec 27, Cranbrook – Dec 28,
Kimberley – Jan 4 - more info on our website

Club Information

Executive

President	Marianne Nahm
Vice President	Hilary Anderson
Past President	Helga Knot
Secretary	Theckla Sawicki
Treasurer	Judy Brunner
BC Nature Director	Stewart Wilson
Director at Large	



Stewart Wilson
Elizabeth Lake volunteers

Committees, Coordinators and Representatives

Agents of Change (formerly Sustainable Cranbrook)	Stewart Wilson
Bats	Scott Bodaly
Bluebirds	Marianne Nahm
Bylaws and Policies	Gretchen Whetham
Christmas Bird Count	Dianne Cooper
Club Camp	Jackie Leach/Ruth Goodwin
Communications	Susan Walp
Early Morning Birding	Daryl Calder
East Kootenay Invasive Species Council	Frank Hastings
Elizabeth Lake	Stewart Wilson
Field Trips	Paula Rogers
Internal Communications	Paula Rogers
Kootenay Conservation Program	Helga Knot
Little Big Day	Greg Ross
Membership	Hasi Oates
Newsletter	Susan Walp
Personal Information/Privacy	Jim Hurvid
Presentations	Marianne Nahm/Paula Rogers
Ram Creek Ecological Reserve	Marianne Nahm
Records	Helga Knot
Rocky Mountain Trench Natural Resources Society	Jo Ellen Floer
Skookumchuck Prairie IBA	Dianne Cooper
Turtle Monitoring	Greg Ross
Upper Columbia Basin Environmental Collaborative	Emma DeGroot
Webmasters	Dianne Cooper

RMNats meetings - every two months, on the third Wednesday of odd-numbered months

Next meetings -	Wednesday	18	January	7:00 pm - AGM and regular meeting
	Wednesday	15	March	7:00 pm
	Wednesday	17	May	7:00 pm