

The Kestrel

Quarterly Newsletter of the
Rocky Mountain Naturalists
2015 spring equinox



Can you find 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.

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The Buttes and Winter Dinner

January 18

On the afternoon of Sunday 18 January a group of RMNats met in the corner of the Staples parking lot across from Husky. Small showers of snow were falling, and gusts of wind were



beginning of the snowshoe/hike



blustery weather over Potato Butte

blowing the clouds around, letting the blue sky show through now and then. We took off for the Buttes and started out [most of us on snowshoes but a couple with just boots] along the base of Potato Butte. It's called that because the native people who lived in the area used to collect the corms of the flowers we know as spring beauties to be used as food in the same way as cultivated potatoes are used, although the spring beauty corms are much smaller. You can go to Potato Butte in spring and find lots of these flowers.



on top of Potato Butte

One group went to the top of Potato Butte, and the rest continued to Lone Pine Butte. We drove home separately, and many of us met other RMNats at a restaurant for our Winter Dinner later in the evening.



Skiing with Dogs at 10K

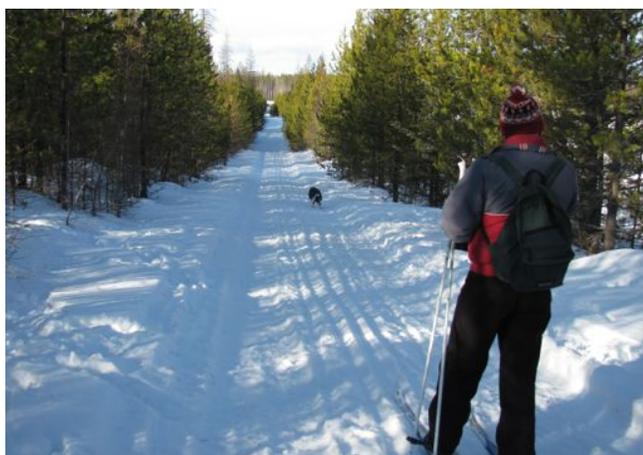
January 24



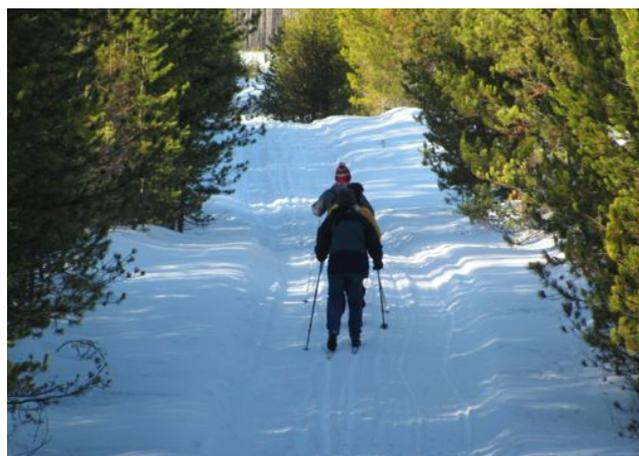
Gerry, Greg, George, Frank and Greg's dog, Chase, are ready to enjoy the 5k loop.
10:30 AM: we will have to hustle a bit to finish before the snow starts getting sticky at noon.



We skied an old logging track through the clear-cuts off Gold Creek road at the 10k sign.
George and Greg on the warm-up climb



Chase leads the way as Gerry enjoys the first rest break.



The Three Amigos approach the western end of the loop.



the final climb before the downhill runs



At the top of longest downhill: Purcells ahead, Baker to our right



George admiring the view of Baker Mountain



We weren't the only ones leaving tracks.



Are these Pine Marten tracks, Nats?



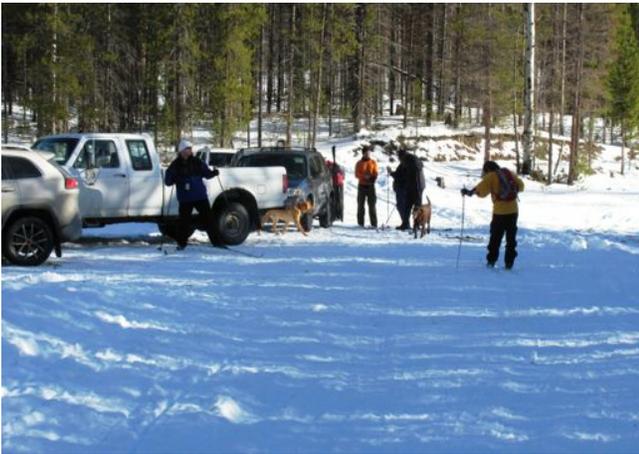
We were overtaken by a dog sledder. . .



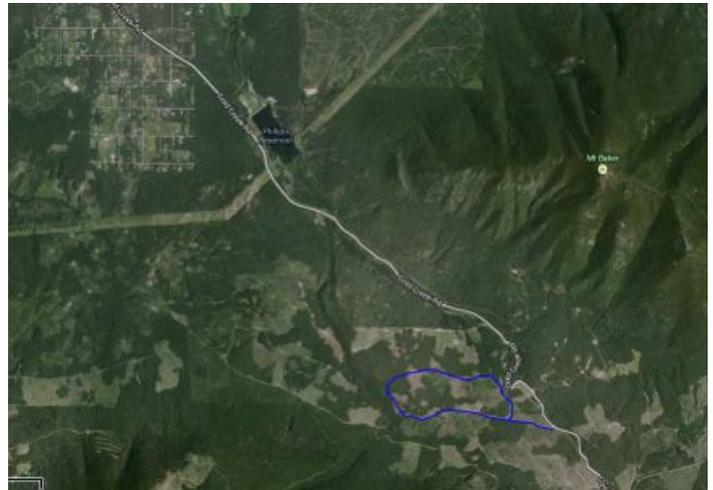
. . . and her husband.



Only another klick and a half, "Go boys Go!"



Back at the vehicles, we meet some guys and dogs that are going to brave the noon-time sticky snow. However, we are heading for Linda's freshly baked banana bread. Yum!



the loop at 10K

pictures and captions by Frank Hastings

Duck Boxes

February 8

A crew of nine RMNats showed up at Elizabeth Lake on a Sunday afternoon to put up eight duck nest boxes. These boxes had already been constructed and painted. They had to be installed three to five

metres above the ground, and they had to be tilted forward enough that rainwater couldn't accumulate and that the ducklings could get out easily when they were old enough. These artificial nest sites had to be hidden from each other and at least 30 metres apart to avoid dump nesting [which is two wood ducks laying eggs in one nest. You can read about

it here: <http://www.npwrc.usgs.gov/resource/birds/woodduck/wddump.htm>]. Each box got a 10 cm layer of wood shavings and a temporary closure for



covering the opening



one of the duck nesting boxes



crossing Elizabeth Lake



passing the swallow nest box

the opening.



Audrey and poplar buds

Six of the boxes went up on the east side of the lake. The crew then crossed the ice. Despite the previous week's warm weather nobody fell through the ice. The crew installed the other two boxes on the west side, where they found two existing boxes. One of these had some flying squirrels, and the other had 17 unhatched eggs. The RMNats decided to replace that last box, so now there are nine duck boxes up around Elizabeth lake.



who's there?

Information in this article is from Myra Juckers. You can see her blog post and more pictures on the RMNats web site, at <http://www.rockymountainnaturalists.org/rmn-blog>. Photos are by Greg.



box

box of unhatched eggs



flying squirrels

Confluence of Matthew Creek

February 22



Daryl

On a bright February afternoon, 15 Naturalists toured the wooded alluvial fan which was formed by the outwash from Matthew Creek where it flows into the St. Mary River. Luckily, some fresh snow had fallen on top of about a foot of very hard snow which had compacted due to a

prolonged mild, dry spell.



Even a tree with a frost crack deserves a hug. Helga

We noted the species distribution of trees, which varied according to the proximity of water. Logging during the past few decades gave us an opportunity to recognize and understand natural regeneration and



Daryl

planting of mixed species. An old oxbow lake created a sunny opening with some slow moving water. Soon we walked into the chilly shade caused by the steep uplands just south of the St. Mary River.



calm oxbow waters Helga

Here we began to see



Ruffed Grouse Helga

many tracks, from the tiny, hopping Deer Mouse to the Canada Lynx with its large, round deliberate prints.



Deer Mouse

Helga

Following some discussion, we

identified the signs of Ruffed Grouse, Red Squirrel, Snowshoe Hare, Deer, Elk and Moose, Coyote and possibly a Timber Wolf. Winter Finches had been feeding on birch and alder catkins, dropping bits of debris, while Three-toed Woodpeckers had flaked the bark from dying larches. Sapsuckers had made rows of 'wells' in deciduous stems.

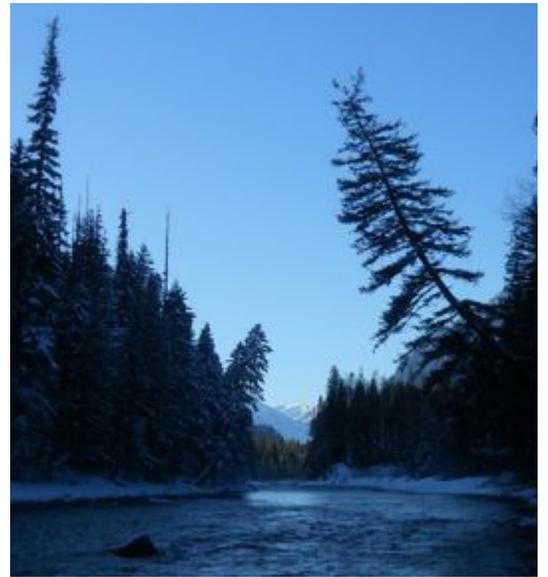


another Ruffed Grouse Helga

The views along the river were particularly spectacular.



the confluence Daryl



St. Mary River Daryl



measuring a big spruce
Gerry

Distant, sunlit, snowy peaks contrasted with the dark water, shadows and large trees. Judging by the abundance and variety of tracks, we shared this unique area with many forest dwellers. George provided some insight to the classified waters and fishing implications while Paula helped us to understand the American Dipper which conveniently appeared in the background. Naturalists anticipate that we will return to this patch of woods in each of the seasons. It is an easily accessible chunk of crown land with a narrow right of way between private acreages.

submitted by Daryl Calder

On the way back we measured several of the large trees for future submission to the BC Big Tree Registry.

Tundra Swans



Here are two spectacular photographs of Tundra Swans, which have been at Wasa since the middle of February. Both shots were captured by Lyle Grisedale.



Helga Knote went out to Wasa as well and captured this picture of ten tundra swans plus one mallard.

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

January 1-March 31	Tony Wideski Winter Seekers Challenge	Peter
March 21-22	Golden Eagle Migration	Virginia
March 28 1:00	Bull River Hike	Helga
April 18 9:30	Memorial Hike	Wasa Ruth
May 4 - 10	Wings Over the Rockies	Invermere
8 - 10	Creston Bird Festival	Creston
23	Little Big Day	Greg
27-28	Crowsnest Bird Count	
31 1:00	Big Tree Hike, Community Forest	Susan
June 9 - 11	Club Camp	Bull River Guest Ranch

Meetings

May 7-10 BC Nature AGM

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

May 20	Wednesday 7 pm	COTR	meeting and presentation
July 15	Wednesday 7 pm	Reade Lake	meeting and birdwatching