

# The Kestrel

Quarterly Newsletter of the  
Rocky Mountain Naturalists  
2015 winter 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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On Tuesday, September 24, twelve hardy hikers, guarded by five intrepid dogs, braved the 1000 foot climb to Bear Lake on the southeast side of the Wild Horse Valley. After a 22 km drive along the river we turned up the badly



weathered access road to the parking area at the trail head, arriving at 11:15 instead of the expected 10:30. Armed with RMN's walkie-talkies, Fearless Leader and George kept the hikers progressing slowly, slowly up the trail in 3 or 4 clusters, with frequent rest breaks.

Every one was at Bear Lake by 1:45, eating lunch, admiring the view and watching Rocke trying to entice Greg's dog into the lake to retrieve a stick in the icy water. It did not



happen. The western larch were golden yellow all around us, the fish jumped after insects, and the vertically bedded limestone, siltstone and shale attested to the power of nature.

Those believing that they were going to take longer to get down started back first, with walking



poles and a radio. Others visited the tarn above and/or circled the lake then started down. Fearless Leader caught up with the first group at the junction between the old and new trails, then stayed with them for the rest of the way to the trail head. Everybody was back at the parking lot (trail head) by 3:30, and we all returned to town by 5:00 or so. -

Frank Hastings (Fearless Leader)

photography by Helga



# Cooper Lake

October 4

One Sunday some RMNats met up and drove in past Lumberton for the 2 or 3 km hike into Cooper Lake. Here is some of what we saw.



ice crystals emerging from mud patch on trail  
Helga



The rock says, "non-motorized", but does anyone care?  
Helga



spruce grouse  
Helga



quad damage to the trail  
Helga



tracks in the mud  
Helga



first glimpse of Cooper Lake Helga



Who lives down there at the end of the lake?  
Helga



top of the old flume Leslia



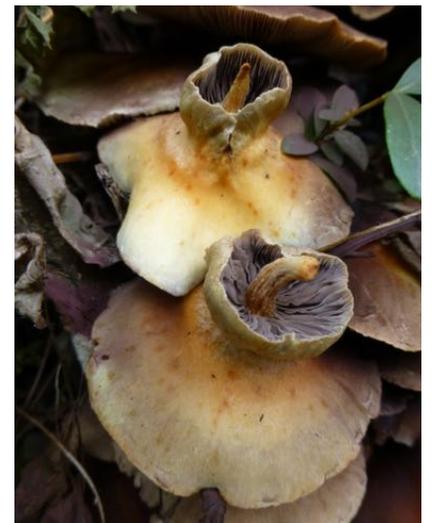
ancient root providing habitat for baby tree  
Helga



one of the residents of the west end  
of Cooper Lake Leslia



aspen Helga



mushroom tops Greg

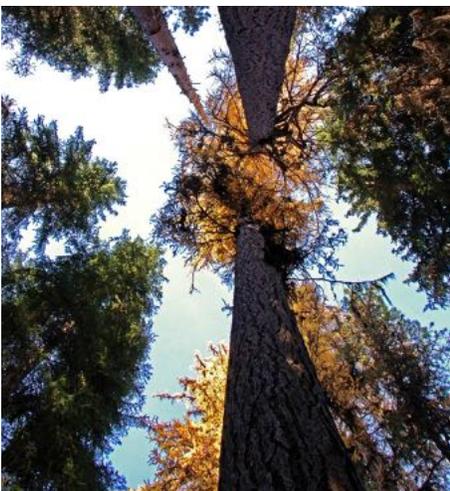


looking west down Cooper Lake

Helga

## Gilnockie Creek Ecological Reserve

October 17



Helga

We had a big, enthusiastic group that ventured into the reserve from its eastern edge - so many vehicles that we had to park at the bridge crossing Gilnockie Creek, where we set out to explore along the creek and into the heart of the reserve. As always the very ruggedness of the area had us tracking up and down the creek and the small cliffs and gullies so we had a good tour. All looks stable - no sign of



Lyle

recent blowdowns or infestation. We did notice a number of purple ribbons on the trees and some spray paint on the eastern boundary. We were wondering if there were plans to log in this small area so close to the reserve. There wasn't too much wildlife to report - deer scat and tracks throughout. The hoots of a Northern Pygmy Owl were heard but the whole area was very dry and we were such a loud group I'm sure any sensible wildlife had scattered.

Anni Coulter



Helga



Lyle



Helga



Helga



Helga



Helga



Anni

## Myrtle Mountain

October 24

Six of us headed up Myrtle Mountain today. It was chilly when we started, but after climbing to the top of the mountain, we had all removed a layer. It was sunny, but we only had glimpses of the sun as we were mostly in deeper woods. We still enjoyed the blue skies and had a lovely outing and good visit with old and new friends.



We noticed some seed heads from plants such as pine drops and coral root, and we saw a variety of sub-shrubs barely a foot off the ground such as twin flower and oregon grape. Plant life was definitely heading toward its winter rest. We pondered the twisted trees and what brings about that dramatic growth habit. Birds heard singing and calling were the RBNU, PIWO, HAWO, RECR, CLNU, CORA, BCCH, DEJU, NOFL, VATH, GCKI.

Another hiker warned of a big brown bear that had been headed our way, but it must have taken another route as no bear was seen or heard thrashing in the brush. We enjoyed panoramic views of the Rocky Mountain Trench from our picnic at the Lookout on Myrtle. As Joy said when were parting, Myrtle Mountain is always good!

Ruth Goodwin

## West Hills "Big Bluff"

October 25

The Rocky Mountain Naturalists are grateful to the dedicated emergency responders who showed extraordinary kindness, courtesy and professionalism, when we called 911 Sunday afternoon, from a ridge overlooking Cranbrook. One of our club members had just suffered a massive heart attack and we were trying to resuscitate him. The 911 first aid coach, who walked us through 40 minutes of CPR via cell phone on speaker mode, was so calm and competent in his minute by minute instructions that the seniors in the group working on their friend were totally confident in what he was saying and what they were doing. The RCMP member and the two Search and Rescue volunteers, who arrived to interview all 17 of us witnesses and take responsibility for evacuating our friend's body, were very respectful, organized and efficient. A final thanks to the STARS helicopter pilot who gave our friend, Peter, the rope swing ride through the sky that Peter, the wildlife biologist, had so often given his beloved mountain sheep.

Frank Hastings



Peter Davidson and friends, October 25

Helga

## A hike through Moe's Canyon to remember Peter November 4



clubmoss

It was an enjoyable time, but tinged with sadness, as the Rocky Mountain Naturalists Club hosted a hike through Moe's Canyon in memory of long-time member Peter Davidson, who passed away suddenly on a club hike only a week before. Some 24 people participated in this two and-a-half hour hike, including several non-club-members who were friends of Peter's.

It was a cool and cloudy day with about half an inch of new snow on the ground for the hike which was quickly organized after Peter's funeral. Participants met at the Kimberley Nordic Trails parking lot

and started up hill on the new "Magic Line" mountain bike trail to the Boundary ski trail run, which leads to the west entrance of Moe's.

We then followed the trail underneath an old mine portal and a mixed forest of aspen, Douglas-fir and larch which still bore some golden needles but were well past their peak. As the trail followed the canyon bottom we climbed slightly and passed some damp, mossy areas then crossed an area of rock slides and large windfalls which were fortunately cleared from the trail. After passing the crest of the canyon floor, we descended into a narrow valley where we started to encounter old growth timber culminating in a small flat at the eastern end of the canyon where there was a magnificent stand of golden western larch, including one with a huge burl about 40 feet up its trunk and measuring more than 13 feet in circumference at breast height. Unfortunately, the giant larch, named "Big Bill", started to lean about five years ago and may not stand erect much longer. It began leaning at the same time as some lodgepole pine salvage logging took place within a hundred yards or so. That may have been a factor in the tree's possible demise. Time will tell.

On the way back, we joined up with the Magic Line Trail again and climbed to the canyon's rim and followed it back to the beginning of the trail, making about a seven km loop. Back at the parking lot the group broke up for home with about a dozen retiring to Montana's Restaurant in the hotel where a toast was raised to Peter and a late autumn day well spent.

story and photos by Gerry Warner



# Ramparts Hike

November 21



Joy

Eight of us went on a walk from the Ramparts Rest area on a new section of the Trans Canada Trail that was completed this year. It will be a great spring time hike, as we passed through open grasslands, along ponds, and through dry and moist woods. It did not take as long as I had thought, and we were back to our vehicles in two hours and twenty minutes. We did find the knoll and bench that several others in the group had visited previously. What a great view! We decided to call that bench the Fisher Bench in Isadore Canyon or the Steeples Bench in Isadore Canyon or some such so we would have a place name.

There were various trails leading off the knoll that warrant further investigation. It was great to meet Ellen, a new member of our club. Sounds like she knows some good trails to explore as well! Regarding natural history, we heard kinglets, nuthatches, chickadees, and Pine Grosbeaks. Overall it was very quiet on the trail but it was a frosty minus 10 degrees when we started out, so maybe the songsters were waiting for a bit warmer weather!

Ruth Goodwin



Ruth

# Pighin Homestead Hike

November 28

It was a beautiful sunny day today when 15 of us set out on a walk from the homestead on Pighin Road, led by Ellen. We saw squirrel, hare, mouse, deer, possibly elk prints in the snow. George explained

that a hare's back footprints are in front of the small front footprints because the back feet go around the front ones when hopping. No



Ellen



Ellen



Joy

birds were heard that I know of. Ellen asked that anyone coming out during ski season stay off the ski tracks if they are snowshoeing, and please leave your dogs at home.

Ellen Perrich

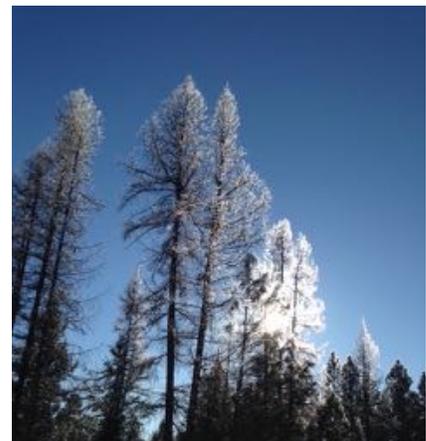


Joy



ice crystals

Joy



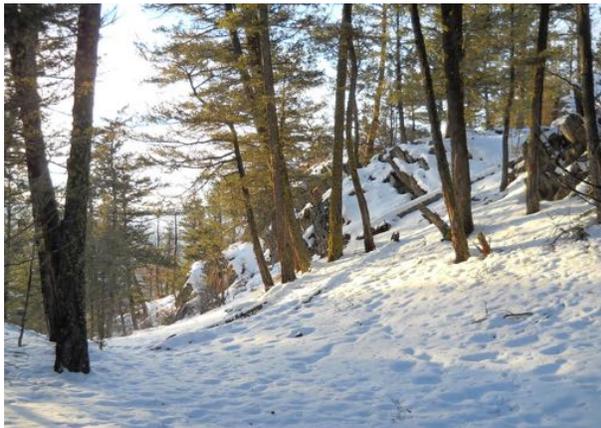
Ellen

# Wilks Woods Loop

December 5

As naturalists arrived at the trailhead, I had a chance to observe the local birds to satisfy my goal of 10 species during the afternoon. A couple of unexpected Chestnut-backed Chickadees in a mixed flock elevated our mood.

Sixteen nats walked through the semi-open coniferous forest along a route which is sometimes favourable for snowshoeing. At the first saddle, we contemplated a shallow pit and hummock feature. The reason was evident when



Cat Pass, where cat [cougar] tracks are sometimes seen Daryl



big cairn on Whiskey Jack George

we noticed nearby a recently uprooted fir tree. The roots had clutched a large chunk of earth and, in the course of decades, released their grip and rotted away, allowing the earth to fall. This mechanical soil disturbance is valuable because

subsoil is brought to the surface. Not only is the soil enriched, but moisture is conserved within the microsite. Trees and plants can get a good start in an otherwise harsh environment.

Kent gladly enriched our knowledge of the subtle factors which influence the occurrence of lichens, including pH, light levels and substrate. Jo Ellen provided explanations of wildfire history and plant communities. Tracks in the snow included elk and deer, cougar, western red squirrel and snowshoe hare. Near the end of the walk, with the help of a certain smell, we concluded that a striped skunk had excavated a small pit in search of crickets etc.

Upon leaving the darker, older forest and entering the selectively logged 'Lot A', many vigorous young trees dominated the north facing slope. A loose flock of Golden-crowned Kinglets, an important boreal forest bird and Canada's smallest songbird, entertained us.

We discussed Christmas tree 'stump culture', growth rates and disease issues. Young Interior Douglas-fir stands can be manipulated to produce sustainable Christmas tree crops. Trees are cut and pruned in such a way that selected limbs will turn up, reaching for the bright sky. Without planting, a grower will try to establish 'stump trees' approximately 3 meters apart. Ultimately, a stump will continue to produce limbs and shoots, the best of which will eventually form a number of Christmas trees. Ideally these trees will be ready for harvest about 2 years apart; a good stump

can produce a dozen or more trees before it loses its vigour. In the past, growers tended to remove all trees that were not Douglas-firs, but recently the philosophy has shifted to favour bio-diversity. We could see the 'naturals', trees which grew from seed as a result of the logging 20 years ago, plus the western larch and ponderosa pine I had planted 15 years ago.

Near the top of Lot A, we enjoyed a wonderful view out to the north toward Bootleg Mtn., Lone Pine Hill and Clearview acres. Sharp-eyed nats picked out the Sun Mine, and a couple of elk herds.



view from Whiskey Jack

George

As we reached the summit of 'Whiskey Jack', we noticed a fir tree with bark flakes strewn around its base. This was the work of Three-toed Woodpeckers searching for bugs which infested the tree. The tree was most likely weakened by a combination of factors including heat and drought. While leaving the area, I glimpsed a small, black, bird flying fast and directly into dense woods.

The 'descent' was not all downhill, but we paused at the top of 'Sunflower Hill'. It has a lovely view of the Rockies and St Eugene Mission. I look forward to leading this same trip, Wilks Woods loop, when more snow accumulates.

Daryl Calder

This file, created by Jo Ellen, shows exactly where we went: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B8zoLstejXUodHQtwldTWFluSHM/view?usp=drivesdk>.

# Trans Canada Trail Section

December 12

One Saturday morning, 15 Naturalists ventured into a winter wonderland. Commencing our journey from the trailhead located off of the Eager Hill Fort Steele Road, we wandered along a well-defined pathway



Paula

through a mixed forest of interior Douglas-fir and ponderosa pine. Many years ago, this whole area had been logged, leaving behind the tell-tale signs of evenly cut stumps which are now homes to a variety of wildlife. A fresh layer of snow provided a wonderful opportunity to spot numerous tracks of deer, elk, squirrels, rabbits, deer mice, grouse, etc. A frozen pond edged with cattails and supporting a large muskrat lodge was surrounded by old wildlife trees full of sapsucker and woodpecker holes. Although the forest was relatively quiet, a few birds were either spotted or heard such as a hairy



Paula



Paula

woodpecker, pileated woodpecker, numerous nuthatches, black-capped chickadees, a Clark's nutcracker and of course the ever present



Paula

Ravens. Our journey took us to the top of a small hill overlooking a wide meadow with Irrigation Road #1 running along the other side. After a short break at

this lookout we slowly made the journey back to the vehicles, pausing to check out badger holes and small branches bearing the signs of elk rubbing the bark off. Even though the sun did not honour us with its appearance, the



Lynn



a woodpecker-drilled tree

Lynn

temperature was mild and the snow glistened on every tree and shrub. A perfect day to be out in nature.

Paula Rogers

## 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](http://www.wildsafebc.com)

B.C. Big Tree Registry <http://bcbigtree.ca/index.a5w>

## 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
Speakers	Paula and Marianne

### Field Trips

#### Leader responsibilities:

- Take radios and first aid kits.
- 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 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



silver and gold at Gilnockie  
Helga

### Upcoming Events

#### Sunday, Dec. 27

Cranbrook Christmas Bird Count  
Meet at Elizabeth Lake Tourist Info @ 8:45 AM  
Feeder Watchers needed

#### Saturday January 2

Kimberley Christmas Bird Count  
Meet in the Platzl Parking Lot @ 8:45 AM  
Feeder Watchers needed

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

January 20    Wednesday    7:00 pm    annual general meeting