

# The Kestrel

Quarterly Newsletter of the  
Rocky Mountain Naturalists  
2016 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](mailto:rmnatskestrel@gmail.com).

# Lazy Lake Paddle

September 25

When we left Cranbrook and on the drive up to Wasa it was quite windy, but all was calm when we arrived at Lazy Lake. Lazy Lake sits about 140 m in elevation above Wasa Lake below. A nice little recreation camp site is there as well as a day use area bordered on its east side by Teepee Mountain, Mount Stevens and Mount Bill Nye of the Rocky Mountain range. We set out with two canoes, five kayaks and one stand up paddle board complete with ten keen paddlers. We took our time, at naturalists' speed, going counter clockwise around the edge of the



George Rogers



George Rogers



Greg Ross

lake. The water was so clear you could see the bottom of the lake from the surface for



Katrin Powell

most of our paddle. Someone from one of the cabins on the lake had put out a "Turtle Spa" which consisted of a few floating logs tied together and anchored not far off shore complete with sign



Greg Ross



Greg Ross

"Turtles Only" so no other animal would use it by mistake. There was only one other boat on the lake, a fisherman who said he had landed and released a couple of "nice ones".

A good time on the lake was had by all. We watched a Bald Eagle perched on a snag being dive bombed by a couple of Clark's Nutcrackers. We also saw a Belted Kingfisher, Red Breasted Nuthatches and a couple of LBJs. After our tough

excursion we thought it would be best if we rested at the Wasa pub and have an appetizer and beverage before the trip home and so we did.

George Rogers



pondweed Greg Ross



Katrin Powell



Greg Ross



Greg Ross

# Big Juniper Hunt

October 2



hunting for the tree

Greg Ross

Fifteen Rocky Mountain Naturalists and one guest climbed up a hill north of Double Duck Lake (close to Cranbrook) to visit the largest rocky mountain juniper registered in the province. It is lucky that it was such a gorgeous fall day, because we ended up spending a lot of time wandering around looking for that tree. Some of the group looked up the approximate coordinates on the internet and used those coordinates in their GPS devices to help us get close to the



successful tree hunter with the big juniper

Gerry Warner



ponderosa pine snag

Greg Ross

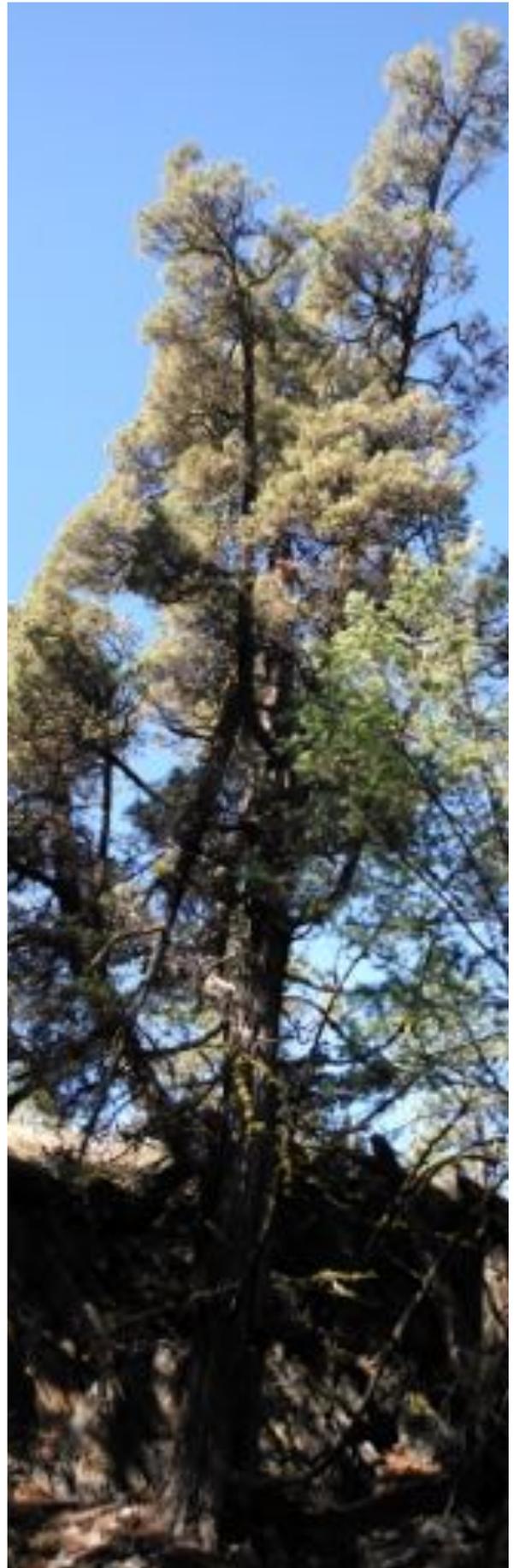
tree, and Virginia finally spotted it. It's a beautiful specimen, and we now know better how to find it in the future. And, besides the juniper, we saw a lot of other neat things out there. We had a good time, getting home in about three hours.

story by Susan Walp



exploded puffball

Greg Ross



big juniper

Gerry Warner

# Eagle Migration Field Trip

October 16

The peak date for fall golden eagle migration in our area is October 11th, according to Vance Mattson, our resident eagle migration expert. He put in 161.75 hours during 37 days counting migrants this fall at the Scarface site near Wasa.

Four hardy naturalists turned out for our fall field trip to watch bald and golden eagles migrate south at the site on October 16th.

Watching hawks and eagles can be quite addicting as thousands of birders clamber onto ridge tops or visit lake shores or coastlines across North America in spring and fall to watch these annual migrations. But identifying these birds can be difficult using traditional field marks. The book Vance recommends for identifying flying raptors is *Hawks in Flight* by Peter Dunne, David Sibley and Clay Sutton (1988).

This book shows us how to recognize hawks the way we often recognize our friends at a distance: general body shape, the way they move and the places they are most likely to be seen. In the foreword, Roger Tory Peterson calls this method the holistic, or gestalt, method. "Identification of distant or fast-moving birds are made on the basis of overt shape, size, plumage, actions—the overall impression," Peterson wrote.

There's no doubt that practice is needed to get competent at identifying hawks and eagles, as well as a good pair of binoculars, a good scope and the company of someone like Vance.



Vance explaining an identification hint

Virginia Rasch

Here is Vance's official record for the day from noon to 6 p.m.:

"The weather was similar to that of yesterday with a temperature of 10° C, a strong south wind and 70-90% altostratus and cumulus cloud cover that obscured the high peaks and brought periodic light rain. Fourteen migrants were tallied between 1320 and 1650 comprising 2 adult Bald Eagles, 11 Golden Eagles (10 adult, 1 juvenile) and 1 female American Kestrel. Four members of the Rocky Mountain Naturalists thoroughly enjoyed the relatively modest movement despite the cool and damp conditions."

Here are his totals for fall migration 2016, which ran from September 20 to November 15:

222 Bald Eagle

206 Golden Eagle

1 Turkey Vulture

7 Osprey

8 Northern Harrier

103 Sharp-shinned Hawk

2 Cooper's Hawk

9 Northern Goshawk

49 Red-tailed hawk

11 Rough-legged Hawk

6 American Kestrel

2 Merlin

2 Peregrine Falcon

1 Prairie Falcon

629 birds TOTAL



Golden eagle wings indent slightly along the trailing edge where they join the body, and the secondaries bulge outward.

photo:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/l djaffe/9299000112/in/photolist-faHNL9-rsqCLL-paRe7g-7u2Rkw-oTBwRB-fatx6a-faHQcE-9oYkoP-7GLghe-htuFDZ-7sXoc3-hs6fDv-fatnJe-fatqW6-4Zgsp4-q3JuLW-pCiEWR-8FnUCs-pPHzAK-s7YnMR-cLd9cL-htvnE9-fatJt8-4T6Vgz-4XJsX8-5sGzXZ-dHTke1-aooC6j-bzaG4b-8ypFan-buENTj-79zcWa-7uxvMt-4oDiEQ-8hQVMa-bHFzhM-f1cbFi-q3Jbo3-nD7iti-dVFiEY-7ZFGpo-ax4qPG-pPZqtS-9ZeP2Q-4sS6Jx-79SEyz-Hi1vIn-h8sFas-7wmfRa-a2GeDN>

For more information, visit the Rocky Mountain Eagle Research Foundation website at <http://eaglewatch.ca/>.

Virginia Rasch

# Mother's Day Hill

October 30

Grey October skies, golden larches and a keen group of naturalists made the best of a fine hike while the seasons change. Mother's Day Hill is an unassuming foothill which overlooks Wycliffe, the St. Mary River and the Trench. A combination of jeep, horse and cross-country trails allows easy access to the quiet woods in all seasons.



on the way up: bear tracks

Rocke Robertson



part way up

Rocke Robertson



Rocke Robertson



Rocke Robertson

Lichen covered snags, black bear tracks and various unidentified scats provided a 'wild' context. Despite the rain-shadow effect and thin soils, huge isolated Douglas-firs and ponderosa pines towered over the upper meadows. Rocky Mountain junipers, with their silvery foliage and plentiful berries, attracted the interest of a Townsend's Solitaire, while Clark's Nutcrackers were most likely feeding on the big pine cone seeds.



two hikers and the view down the St. Mary River  
George Rogers

The viewpoint where we stopped for lunch is surprisingly magnificent: a bird's eye view of the river and Perry Creek below, as Wycliffe stretches over to the Rockies. Doug found a comfortable backrest, but inadvertently relaxed his grip on his apple. In slow motion it tumbled down onto one mossy ledge, then another, before catching big air into the abyss. Perhaps a cruising nutcracker will notice and appreciate the offering.

A short climb to the northwest claimed the actual summit, with a view of Muley

Mountain and upper Perry Creek. A pair of Grey-Crowned Rosy Finches perched on a low uproot, and, without flinching, allowed all seventeen nats to pass nearby. While examining a recent lightning strike, we noticed how the bolt travelled down the large tree, following the root to ground and charring a small area.

This walk was memorable thanks to the elk crossing the St. Mary river, a Dusky Grouse bursting from cover and a lone dandelion flower. In winter, we'll likely



Grey-crowned Rosy Finches      Rocke Robertson

have hoar frost, misty clouds, animal tracks and great snowshoeing.

Daryl Calder



Rocke Robertson



lightning-struck wildlife larch      Greg Ross

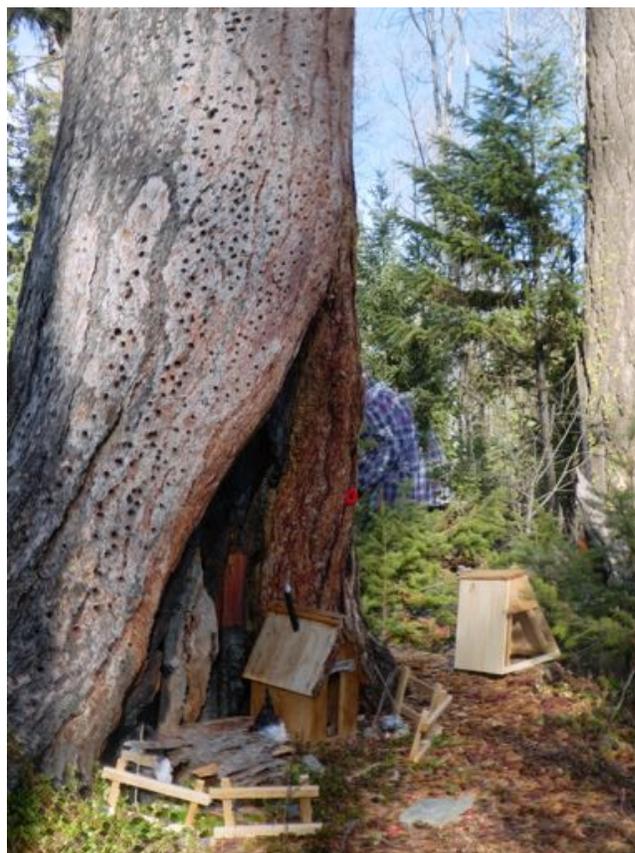
route that we can do as an outing once we get enough snow. On the Far East trail we checked out a gnome garden at the base of a lightning-struck wildlife tree. Adele and I created this garden earlier in the Fall.

Sandy McArthur

On Remembrance Day 14 hikers got above the fog into blue skies and sunshine up at the South Star trails. The paths were thick with needles from western larch trees as we hiked the K-9 trail to the Far East trail. The intention of hiking that day was to show the Naturalists an awesome cross country skiing



Greg Ross



the base of that larch

Greg Ross

# Columbia River Predators and Prey: Eagles and Kokanee

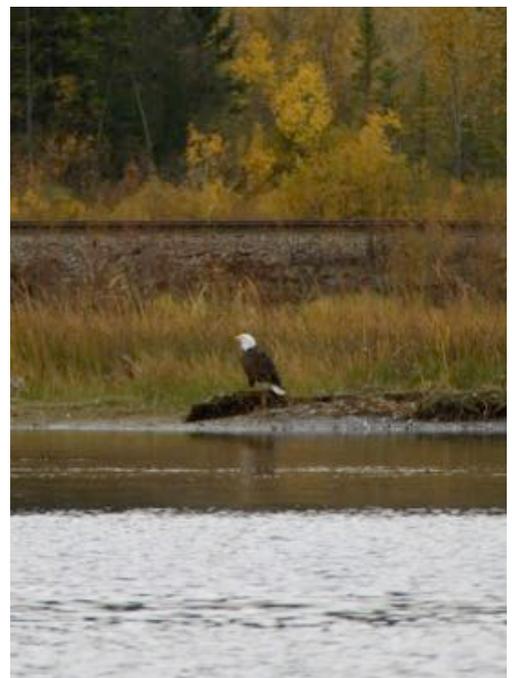
September 28



There were literally hundreds of kokanee spawning in the gravel of the main channel of the Columbia River at Wilmer just upriver of where Toby Creek joins it.



We didn't see any bald eagles catch any of the spawning kokanee while we kayaked this length of river this morning.



story and photos by Stewart Wilson

# Elizabeth Lake Cleanup

November 6

On November 6, 2016, a very small group of Naturalists, armed with shovels, rakes and wheel barrows, spread a good sized pile of bark chips over a portion of the trails at Elizabeth Lake. Also quite a few logs which were strewn haphazardly about were picked up and neatly piled in one spot. This was a good clean up session to get ready for the winter.

Paula Rogers



George Rogers

# Solar Arrays on Natural Lands – Info and RMN Response

Last year (2015), the BC Government received an application for Crown land for “the purpose of investigating the feasibility of” developing solar power generation near Skookumchuck.

Solar is good, right? Err, not necessarily! Not if it covers up an Important Bird / Biodiversity Area (IBA), which is where the solar companies want to develop. Nor any other ecologically valuable land!

The Rocky Mountain Naturalists, BC Nature, and several others submitted comments in opposition to this threat to Skookumchuck Prairie IBA. The bases of our arguments included:

- These lands are ecologically valuable and would be highly impacted.
- There are many other locations, places already highly impacted by humans, where solar panels would be better placed.
- Placing solar panels on ecologically valuable land is contrary to the “green” purpose of solar power generation.

Unfortunately, our opposition was not heeded, and that first application was approved, with support from the Regional District of East Kootenay. Another application has also been approved and ‘accepted’ by Node Engineering for lands between Cranbrook and Fort Steele.

Since then, eight more requests have been made (see map) for hundreds of thousands of hectares! Most of this land is ungulate winter range or other good habitat, including more pieces of the IBA. The IBA has the core population of Long-billed Curlews nesting in the East Kootenays, likely 22 pairs, and has been enhanced for and subsequently well-used by Lewis’ Woodpecker, both of which are Species-at-Risk. Last year, Joe and I found five LEWO nests on the IBA in ONE afternoon’s drive! It seems this threat is not to just the IBA but much of the East Kootenay’s valuable valley bottom habitats. This land is not like the land where Kimberley’s Sun Mine is located. Those solar panels are on reclaimed land from the Sullivan Mine’s ore mill, which has less ecological value.

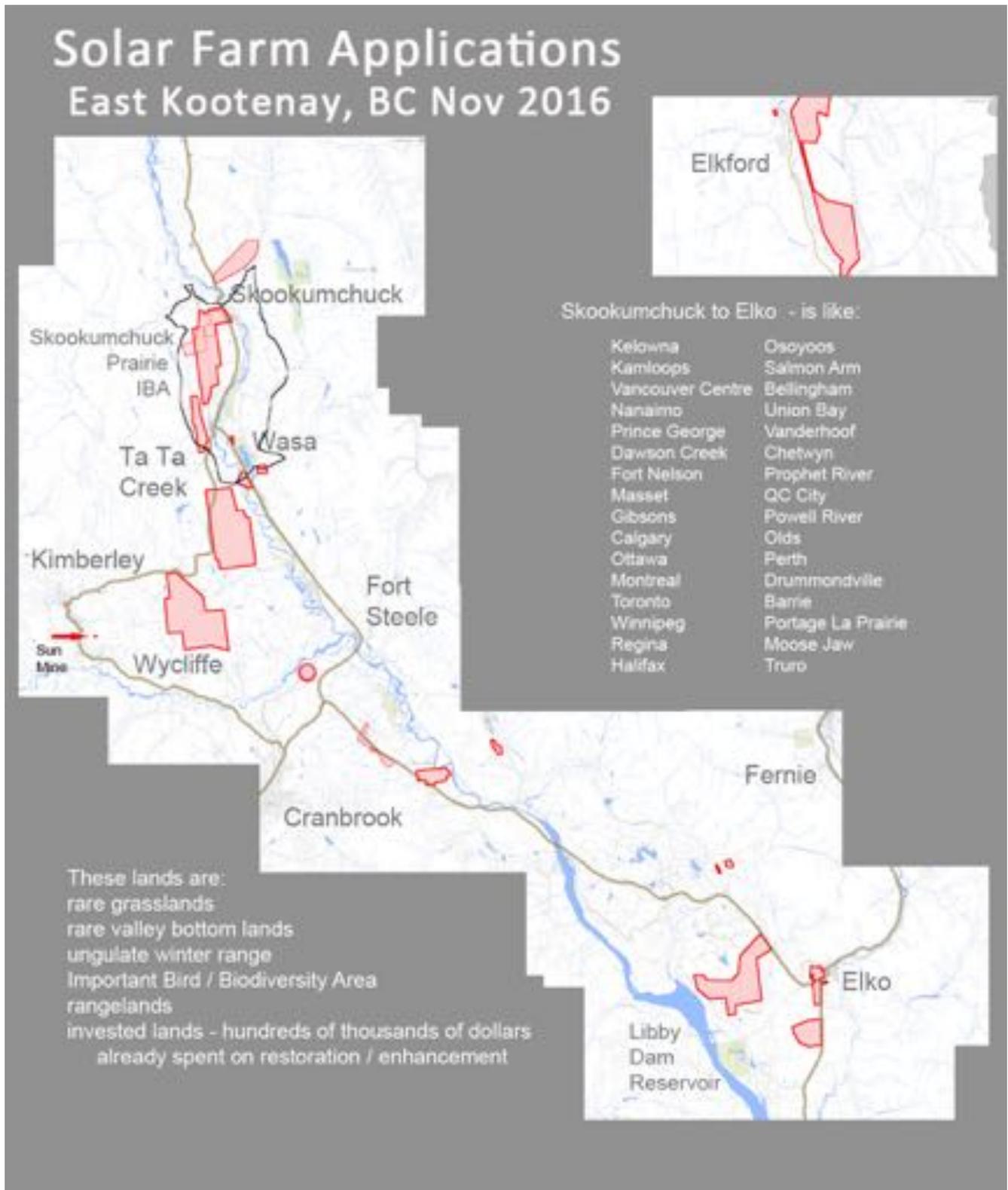
The RMN submitted comments opposing the latest three applications (SB Solar Holdings) and included general arguments for the placement of solar arrays. Many others have also submitted comments: BC Nature, the Rocky Mountain Trench Society, Pine Butte Ranch, the Back Country Hunter’s Association, the Kootenay Livestock Association, and many individuals – that I know of. Also, I have personally sent letters to the head of the Lands branch in Cranbrook, all applicable MLAs, RDEK members, and our MP.

International Standards recommend three primary policies for placing solar arrays:

- Place facilities away from important ecological resources.
- Site projects on previously disturbed or altered landscapes.
- Site the project on lands which have not been ecologically enhanced nor would remove lands from other economically valuable activities.

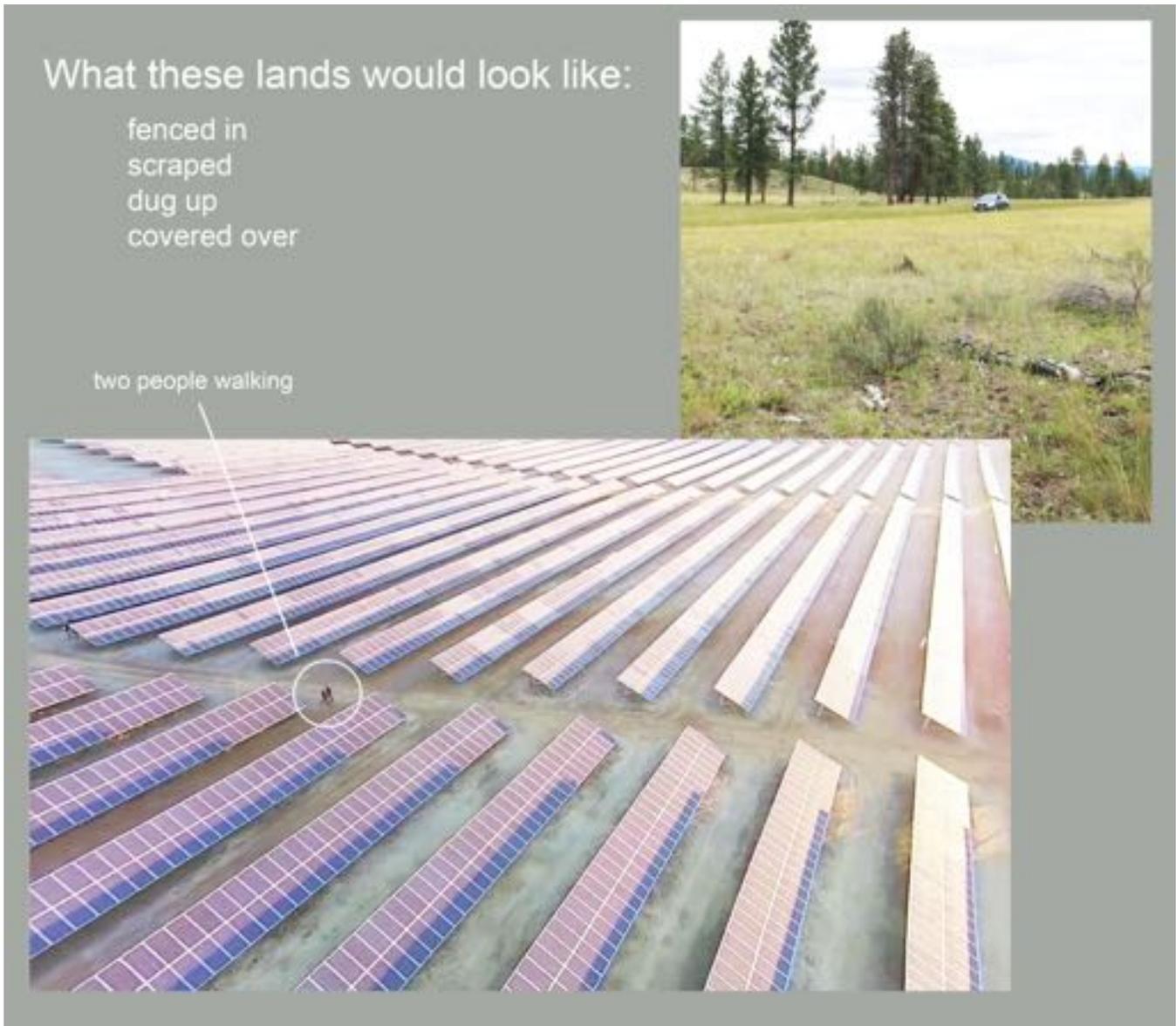
The International Energy Agency claims that 30,000 solar panels will be installed every HOUR over the next five years all over the Earth. That is 720,000 panels a day. This technology could be very useful to help mitigate the effects of climate change, for sure, and the solar companies

are banking on that sentiment. Pressure to develop these will be relentless. A large array is going in near Vulcan Alberta on a private farm: 960 acres; and if you search the internet for solar



projects you will see the millions of panels already installed. Many believe and are working toward a decentralized model of solar production – placing solar panels on existing structures – as the best model. More rooftop installations mean less valuable land is threatened.

The Provincial Government does NOT currently have policies regarding solar arrays. (They are operating under policies for wind towers). The East Kootenay is the only area in BC where solar arrays are planned. So it is up to us here in the East Kootenay to force the governments to get these facilities placed properly in British Columbia. Please keep your ears open for any



developments in this issue and help as you can to ensure these projects are done appropriately. Thank you.

Dianne Cooper

## Fireball 4569

Fireballs are meteors that appear brighter than normal. Although they occur every day all over the Earth, they are rare spectacles witnessed very few times in each of our individual lifetimes.

On the morning of November 18, I saw a fireball at approximately 6:50 a.m. in Cranbrook, and it became Fireball 4569-2016 (the last four digits for the year). The bright white light was heading eastward low in the sky, and I saw it for a few seconds before it disappeared from my view behind buildings.

How did this fireball get a name? I contacted our resident astronomer and fellow naturalist Dan Hicks, and he told me to report fireball sightings to the International Meteor Organization ([www.imo.net](http://www.imo.net)).

Dan helped me find the subsequent data that showed that someone by the name of "H" also spotted Fireball 4569-2016. H saw it at 6:40 from Harvie Heights in Alberta and estimated that the elevation was 1,332 metres. I estimated its elevation at 920 metres; my lower elevation indicates that it was descending.



Creative Commons photo

As Dan wrote me, "Suffice to say, you and H witnessed the fiery terminal flight of a doomed celestial visitor, expired satellite or other space junk, or perhaps a flying saucer on an urgent errand.

"Whatever Fireball 4569-2016 was, the frustrated RMN supermoon chasers should be very jealous."

I like to think that I saw a magical meteor on its final trajectory and not just dated space junk. Nonetheless, I strongly encourage you to report any fireballs that you are lucky enough to see to the IMO.

Virginia Rasch

# Sharing Your Fireball Sighting

Should you be fortunate enough to witness a fireball meteor flashing across the night sky, brighter than Venus at its most brilliant and vanishing in seconds, you can share this exceptional experience with the wider world by reporting your observation to the International Meteor Organization (IMO). In a twelve-step process, the IMO's website will want to know your observation time and location, the fireball's magnitude (brightness), color, trajectory (direction), speed, azimuth (compass bearing), elevation (angle in the sky), duration and whether there was a remnant train or associated sound. If observers from other locations also record their sightings of the same fireball with the IMO, its composite trajectory can be determined, and possibly, should it survive the plunge through our atmosphere, its discovery as a terrestrial meteorite. Visit the IMO website ([www.imo.net](http://www.imo.net)), examine the maps and observer reports linked to the latest event-numbered fireballs, and search "fireball" for a detailed definition.

Dan Hicks

## 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>

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

Astronomy <http://earthsky.org/tonight>, [heavens-above.com](http://heavens-above.com)

Animal Tracks

While having fun out in the snow this winter, you may see animal tracks. This site may help identify them: <http://cwf-fcf.org/en/news-features/articles/animal-tracks.html>

International Meteor Organization [www.imo.net](http://www.imo.net)

## Mystery Photo: What is this?

This is a new feature in *The Kestrel*. Rocky Mountain naturalists submit interesting, intriguing photos of any natural history subject and then ask a question of the readers based on the photo. The questions can vary from “What is this?” to “What is it doing?” say if a bird is exhibiting some quizzical behaviour. Other mystery photos could be animal tracks or scat (only naturalists and doctors could care about scat—right?). The write-up for the newsletter should contain basic, relevant information to the photo.



Here's our first submission:

When: November 20, 2016

Where: Cherry Creek Conservation Property

Habitat: These tiny organisms were floating on the surface of small puddles that were in tire tracks on a muddy road. The road crossed a field in the Kootenay River valley bottom.

Size: This clump of red organisms is about three to four inches in diameter.

Submitted by: Virginia Rasch. My friend Verena and I saw these organisms while birding the property, and I took the photo.

What is this? Please submit your answer to [rmnatskestrel@gmail.com](mailto:rmnatskestrel@gmail.com) by March 1. The answer will be reported in the next issue of *The Kestrel*.

This is a new feature in *The Kestrel*. Please submit your mystery photo and write-up to [rmnatskestrel@gmail.com](mailto:rmnatskestrel@gmail.com) by March 1 for the spring issue of the newsletter.

## 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 for meetings	Paula and Marianne
Field Trips	Paula Rogers



on a South Star trail 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. 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, along with pictures, as soon as possible.

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

### Upcoming Events

Christmas Bird Counts: Cranbrook – Wednesday, December 28; Kimberley –  
Wednesday, January 4, 2017

Rocky Mountain Naturalists Winter Social

Saturday, February 4, 2017, Kimberley Nordic Ski Hut

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

Next meeting - Wednesday 18 January 2017