

# The Kestrel

Quarterly Newsletter of the  
Rocky Mountain Naturalists  
2017 fall equinox



Audubon California

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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).

# Cactus Mountain

July 8

One Saturday morning some of us scrambled up above an old gypsum quarry and wandered around a southwest facing hillside on Cactus Mountain. We saw our



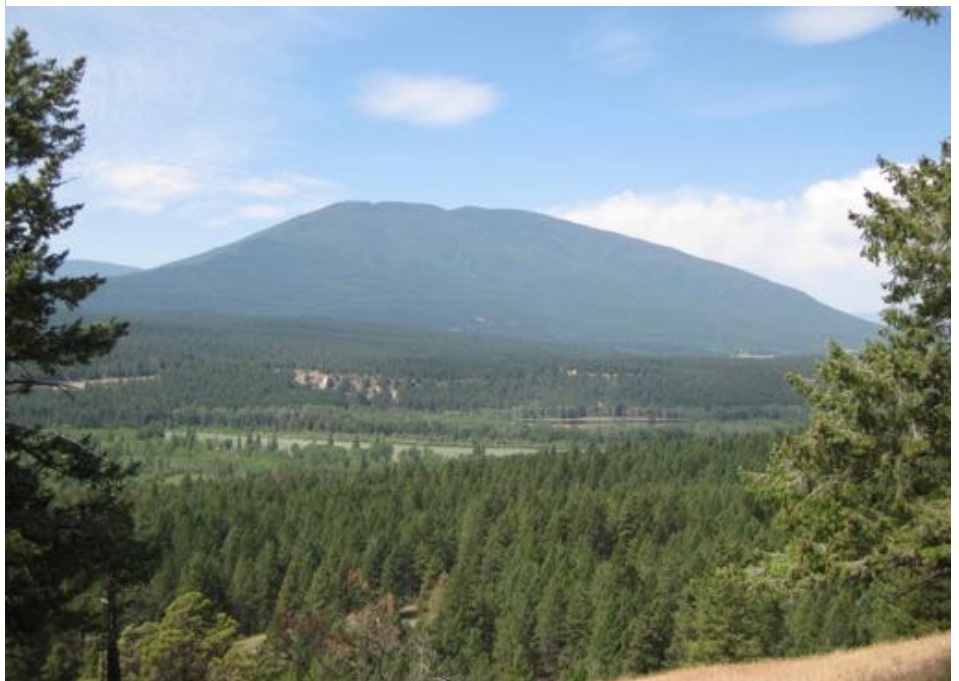
prickly-pear fruits [purple knobs]

The off-white cone on top of each fruit is a dried-up flower.

native cactus, the brittle prickly-pear, up there, and we saw and heard a nighthawk. And, of course, there were



mat of brittle prickly-pear cactus - deer pellets for scale



view across Kootenay River to Mt. Baker



asexual reproduction

This fragment has landed in a good spot. That moss may trap enough soil particles to support growth of a new cactus plant as soon as some rain falls.

beautiful (if hazy) views.

The brittle prickly-pear grows here in open ponderosa pine forests, on south or west facing slopes, usually on rock outcrops. Other prickly-pear species grow in the southern Okanagan and on the prairies, but our species grows in the southern Rocky Mountain Trench. It is called brittle because the stems break away easily.

This brittleness is how the brittle prickly-pear reproduces asexually -

without flowers or pollination or fruits. The sharp spines get stuck in the passing sole of a hiker's boot, the fleshy part of a deer's hoof, a rabbit's paw or something; then a piece of cactus breaks off and hitches a ride to some new place. If that little piece of cactus lands in a good place when the spines finally come out of whatever it was hitching a ride on, it will send down roots and start a new cactus plant. This is one way the cactus spreads.



looking south along Kootenai

While we were hiking on Cactus Mountain we saw a nighthawk sitting on the branch of a fallen tree. Marianne saw it open its huge beak and give a couple of calls. It stayed very still for a long time. Finally, it turned and eventually flew, performing some aerobatics possibly designed to scare the humans away from a nest hidden among the grasses. We then left the area, stepping carefully and watching where we placed our feet. Another possibility was that it was a young nighthawk begging for food, but we walked with care just the same.

photos and story by Susan Walp

# Curlew Update

Long-billed Curlew of Skookumchuck Prairie: Fall 2017

Correction: the website to view the tracks of the Skookumchuck Curlews is not the Boise State University website stated in the summer *Kestrel* newsletter but at:

<http://birdscanada.org/research/speciesatrisk/index.jsp?targetpg=lbcu>

## Bad News First

Unfortunately, we have lost two of the curlews, already, both around June 24 – 26. Equina was found dead on the side of the highway just south of Ford Road. Very sad. It looks like she got hit by a vehicle, then scavenged a bit. Her transmitter was crushed and does not appear salvageable.



Argyle, very upset, near Ford Road, around the time Kimberley and Equina died  
Dianne Cooper

We knew something was up because the fixes sent by her transmitter were clustered – which means it is stationary.



what's left of curlew

Dawn Storgaard

So, we went to look. It took us a couple of days, because the fixes aren't that accurate. But we did find her.

Then we noticed that Kimberley's fixes were clustering too. This did not look good. Especially since the last reliable fix was very near where some Great Horned Owls had been seen a couple of weeks



Doug, curlew feather and transmitter

Dawn Storgaard



Joe looking at Kimberley's wings at the perching stump where they were found:

Dianne Cooper

done next year but on a bird around Prince George – to further compare breeding populations.

earlier. Joe and I went to have a look and found parts of her – her wings – at the base of a stump. RIP Kimberley. Again, very sad. But we couldn't find the rest of her nor the transmitter that day so we organized a field trip to search for it. Eight of us went out and scoured the area ... and Yay! We found it! This is good! Because these transmitters cost over \$5,000. It is in good working order, so hopefully it can get deployed on another curlew – which will likely be



curlew transmitter

Dawn Storgaard

Migration and Wintering

The five remaining curlews seem happily ensconced on their wintering areas at time of writing. Four of them are spread out in the Central Valley of California, and one is near Mexicali, Mexico.

Pine and Mildred had already left the East Kootenays when Equina and Kimberley died. They left within a day of each other, Pine leading the way on June 21, and both headed for Enterprise, Oregon. It is typical for female shorebirds to head south before their chicks can fly, leaving the chicks in the care of the mate until fledging. The theory on this is that the cost of laying such large eggs, relative to body size, is tremendous and biologically stressful; the females need to get down to the rich feeding areas of their wintering grounds to get ready for next year's migration and nesting season. Makes you wonder why they come up here to nest, though. Pine's chicks (two of them, we think) were only a week old when she left. Mildred's (four chicks) were 2 ½ weeks old, but we know her mate, Solar, stuck around for another five weeks raising them.

Pine paused for a day at Enterprise, then did some hops before heading over the Sierra Madre Mountains. Mildred, arriving a day later, paused for four days, at Enterprise. Both arrived in central California within two days of each other, Pine first.



the Curlew Caper Crew: seven of the eight people who went looking for the transmitter  
Dawn Storgaard

Argyle, mate of Kimberley and the last to leave the East Kootenay, is currently border hopping between the US and Mexico in the Imperial Valley south of the Salton Sea in southern California. He has to fly over a big solar farm when he goes back and forth. This would be a great place to study the effects of solar arrays on curlew health. He flew 1,900 km and it took him four days; one single flight in that time appears to have been 55 hours long.

Compare that to Solar's migration. It looks like he has the record for longest flight at 58 hours, maybe stopping just once. So it took him only 2 ½ days to get from here to central California.

But then there is Mojo. When Mojo set out on July 2, it looked like he was heading the same way as Pine and Mildred, but then when he got to Enterprise, Oregon, he kept going for a while. But then, he must have got tuckered out and decided to pause for a bit. He headed west, finding green farm fields in the middle of nowhere to tide him over until he got to Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, Oregon. He spent 40 days there before heading to central California, where he finally arrived August 17.

This telemetry data is so neat to have. For instance, when we had our last RMN meeting (19 July), out overlooking Reade Lake, as usual for our July meeting, we knew that Argyle had left Skookumchuck Prairie already and was wandering around Pine Butte Ranch and Porteous Road fields, getting ready to head south.

Anyway, thank you to all who came to help look for Kimberley's transmitter, and especially Doug Storgaard for finding it.

I can hardly wait for next spring to see who comes back and to get out to the Prairie to look for them! How about you?

Dianne Cooper



Doug and Dawn Storgaard with Kimberley's transmitter  
Dianne Cooper

## 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>

Curlew locations <http://birdscanada.org/research/speciesatrisk/index.jsp?targetpg=lbcu>



### Mystery Photo from summer issue

Nesting Saxifrage, Peak Saxifrage, Swamp Saxifrage

*Saxifraga nidifica*

Synonyms: *Micranthes montana*, *Micranthes nidifica*, *Micranthes plantaginea*, *Saxifraga bracteosa* var. *micropetala*, *Saxifraga columbiana*, *Saxifraga crenatifolia*, *Saxifraga integrifolia* var. *columbiana*, *Saxifraga integrifolia* var. *leptopetala*, *Saxifraga integrifolia* var. *micropetala*, *Saxifraga montana*, *Saxifraga nidifica*, *Saxifraga plantaginea*

identified, from the photo, by Bryan Kelly-McArthur, met at Wings Over the Rockies this spring, and his botanist colleague

confirmed on multiple web pages

That long list of synonyms shows that even botanists can't always decide what to call something!

## Mystery Photo: What is this?



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

Please submit your mystery photo and write-up to [rmnatskestrel@gmail.com](mailto:rmnatskestrel@gmail.com) by December 1 for the winter issue of the newsletter.



## Club Information

### Executive

President	Virginia Rasch
Past President	George Rogers
Vice President	Helga Knot
Secretary	Marianne Nahm
Treasurer	Linda Hastings
BC Nature Director	Greg Ross



kinnikinnick

Susan Walp

### Committees and Club Representatives

Little Big Day	Greg Ross	Bylaws and Policies	Virginia Rasch
Christmas Bird Counts	Dianne Cooper	Newsletter	Susan Walp
Elizabeth Lake	Stewart Wilson	Invasive Species	Frank Hastings
Field Trips	Paula Rogers	Trench Society	Jo Ellen Floer
Membership	Sue Ross	Bluebirds	Marianne
Presentations	Paula and Marianne	Turtle Monitoring	Greg Ross
Club Camp	Jackie Leach and Ruth Goodwin		

### 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 to [rmnatskestrel@gmail.com](mailto:rmnatskestrel@gmail.com), 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

These are events planned at the present time. Watch your inbox for more details, possible changes and additional events.

October	Devil's Hole
	Cherry Creek
	Hobgoblin Lake
November	Jaffray Survey

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

Next meetings - Wednesday 15 November

Wednesday 17 January