

The Kestrel

Quarterly Newsletter of the
Rocky Mountain Naturalists
2018 summer solstice

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Lyle Grisedale

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.

Salesbury Creek Snowshoe

March 29

Well, we bearily[sic] got going, when Lyle indicated possible caribou tracks. Upon closer examination, we found evidence suggesting that a large moose had crossed our road and a large bear had intercepted these distinctive prints and turned to follow them.



It was the fourth time Rocky Mountain Naturalists had ventured into this forested area west of



Cranbrook. It is a worthwhile location in late winter because of relatively easy accessibility to a deep snowpack. The forest is diverse due to milder, moister West Kootenay influences combining with features of the Trench. This habitat supports a wide array of mammals whose prints, scats and other signs stimulate naturalist curiosity.

While recent log harvesting has created openings in the forest, our route traversed sections of old woods and reforested patches. We could identify tree species in two ways: at a distance by observing bark or crown profile or up close by handling or sniffing the foliage. Juvenile spacing and thinning young forest using chainsaws made this forest difficult to walk





through. Lots of alder was bent over by snow, with abundant limbs grown in response to the increased sunlight. Occasionally, large stumps and wildfire scars hinted at the forest history.

Following some additional examination and discussion of the daunting bear prints, we decided





we needed more information. Knowledge of which species was more likely to be active or how the prints and claws register when the animal was climbing or descending would have been helpful. In the woods we had seen where black bears had clawed the bark from trees, in order to feed on the nutrient-rich cambium layer, or climbed trembling aspen trees. Our big bear may have been a Grizzly,

and perhaps, when we head up Salesbury Creek next year, we can solve a few more puzzles.

Daryl Calder
photos by Lyle Grisedale



Pat Morrow, well known Canadian mountaineer, is a Kain enthusiast who lives in Wilmer, near Invermere, and runs a webpage about Conrad Kain [<http://conradkain.com/>].

The Rocky Mountain Naturalists had a 2017 cemetery tour to coordinate with Wildsight's showing of *Hobnails and Hemp Rope*, a film about the first ascent of Bugaboo Spire, guided by Conrad Kain, a century earlier. The filmmakers attempted to celebrate Kain by assembling their entire



Pat Morrow telling the group about Henriquetta Kain



Pat Morrow describing Conrad Kain's climbing style

outfit, using clothing, food and equipment which would have been used by Kain as he led this very difficult ascent. The Kain story is very interesting and crucial to the evolution of the East Kootenays.

After looking at Conrad Kain's grave, and that of his wife Henriquetta, we looked at several other sections of the cemetery and graves of curious personalities who shaped the Cranbrook area a century or more ago. I plan to organize another similar event in April 2019.

Daryl Calder
photos by Stewart Wilson

Balancing Rock Trail and Bike or Paddle

April 30

A late April morning found 11 naturalists very slowly making their way up the Balancing Rock Trail just a few metres off Highway 3, across from the Creston wetlands. A flash of yellow at the trailhead had piqued our curiosity (Nashville Warbler) reminding us to proceed without rushing. Some flowers along the trail included delicate ballhead waterleaf, stunning glacier lilies, Saskatoon or serviceberry, calypso orchid, trillium, Indian paintbrush and shooting star.

After viewing the 400 ton granitic balancing rock, we neared the patch of skunk cabbage (swamp lantern or yellow arum). Rob identified the call of a Barred Owl while the tiny Pacific Wren sang. A short detour to the power line right of way had Daryl pointing to trickling water, a Varied Thrush whistling and seven species of brush. In a few minutes we reached a mossy lunch spot with a view to the Summit Creek Leech Lake Unit. Another



Bob Whetham



Nashville warbler

Bob

kilometre or so of walking took us down the hill, under the Highway 3 bridge and back to where several of our cars were parked. Jo Ellen explained how this area was first a mill site and then a popular campground. Due to factors such as large cottonwood danger trees, mosquitoes and provincial cost cutting, the campground facility was permanently closed.

Two new members, Janice and Roger, joined us for the day. Roger was curious

about conifers so 'kept us on our toes' with questions about grand firs and the Kootenay conifer mix.

One group of five then began a bike tour of the dike area starting at the old campground. Jackie reported that the Birding Bikers observed herons and cormorants flying with sticks, busy building nests. After almost three hours of biking, cold beer and fish and chips in Creston was a well earned treat.



trillium

Bob



birding bikers

Jackie Leach

The remaining members launched their watercraft at the old ferry crossing on the Kootenay River. By hugging the bank and avoiding the strong currents, a two kilometre paddle up the big river brought us to the confluence with the Goat River. Just a couple hundred metres up the Goat we entered a quiet side channel for a lazy meander to the end. The Lower Kootenay Indian Band and its partners

had undertaken a restoration project adjacent to the channel. Minor log jams had been created, designed to catch debris and enhance fish habitat. Trees and shrubs, protected by special sleeves to defend against beavers, mice and ungulates, were planted and appeared to be establishing themselves.

Marianne Nahm



Jackie

It's always a pleasant drive to Columbia Lake, with Western Meadowlarks singing from fence posts, American Kestrels on the wires, glimpses of the big river and sweeping views of prairies and mountains. In preparation for the Wings Over the Rockies Festival in early May, Rocky Mountain Naturalists previewed two areas.

The Headwaters of the Columbia walk utilizes a trail built by the citizens of Canal Flats. Their fine interpretive signs are a good example of how well planned and designed signage enhances an outdoor experience. In this area, groundwater has a significant influence on vegetation. Near the lake and the small streams, the ecosystem is known as carr, a fen (wetland area where the water table is always very close to the surface) where shrubs are the dominant species. Shrubs and herbs flourish depending on the underlying soils and gravels, forming a mosaic of multiple communities. We could identify various junipers, willows, birches and red osier dogwood within the tangle. Further from the soggy soils, conifers dominate, mostly spruce with occasional ponderosa pine and interior Douglas-fir.

Of course, many bird species thrive in this mix. The Ruby-crowned Kinglets, more often heard rather than seen, were common. These tiny birds are crucial to the health of northern conifer forests as they feed upon little insects which would damage trees if left unchecked. Hummingbirds, warblers, hawks and eagles were also observed.

One delicate little flowering perennial added a sprinkling of light purple near the springs which ultimately become the Columbia River. Birds-eye primrose, a native of Northern Europe, grows in



boggy fens rich in lime. It is endangered in its historic range due to the usual culprits of development and draining of wet areas. It needs lots of sun, preferring grazed areas, as it cannot tolerate shade from taller plants. Here it seemed to be much more abundant than in previous years.

The gang then drove a short

distance to contemplate the delicate and descriptive pictographs at the base of an overhanging bluff. We wondered where the enduring pigment originated and if it was a tradable commodity centuries ago.

After luncheon while overlooking Columbia Lake at the rest area, we hiked the familiar trail up to the rim of the Fairmont Hoodoos. Recent trail upgrades were intended to cope with runoff and ever increasing foot traffic. New signage here provided help with interpretation of various aspects of the site.



One bird species which we hoped to observe was not obvious at first. The narrow cracks and cavities within the hoodoos provide habitat which suits this speedy bird. This is the most northerly breeding population of the White-throated Swift; about 20 swooped, squeaked and mated in mid-air. Of the estimated 1.1 million North American population, about 1% breed in Canada. Populations are slowly declining and the level of conservation concern is presently rated as low. Our gang also observed grouse, flycatchers, swallows and birds of prey. We are very fortunate to



enjoy wild areas and their diverse attributes in the East Kootenay.

The two Wings trips, a few days later, were very well attended; the guests were quiet, curious, attentive, appreciative and inspired. Just like us!

Daryl Calder

pictograph photos by
Doug Leach

Spring Plant Identification

May 17



On Thursday, May 17, 2018, a group of Naturalists ventured into the flower filled meadows off the Mission Wycliffe Road. Bryan Kelly-McArthur, the speaker from our May meeting, joined us on our search for and helped us identify various spring wildflowers. Bryan was a wonderful addition to our adventure with his vast knowledge of plants and his passion for anything nature related. The

meadows were awash with the blue-purple colour of the low larkspur while the hillsides were carpeted with the brilliant yellow of the balsam root. Puccoon and old man's whiskers were in abundance as well as the meadow death camas, alumroot, lupine, small flowered anemone, to name just a few. Although we did not cover a



balsam root



great distance, numerous new species (for some of us) or variations of some familiar species were



puccoon

discovered on our 2 1/2 hour meander through the meadows.



larkspur

story by Paula Rogers, photos by George Rogers



McGinty Lake

Meadowbrook Community Association Celebration

May 27

A couple of Nats were pleased to be invited to the Spring Celebration hosted by the Meadowbrook Community Association (MCA) at McGinty Lake, just east of Kimberley. The association's significant fencing project is largely complete and providing benefits.

McGinty Lake is a small, shallow pond in a forested setting with glimpse views of the mountains. One of the priorities of the MCA is to preserve and protect the recreational values of this quiet, fragile spot. Pressures from uncontrolled cattle grazing and off-road vehicle usage needed to be reduced. With help and advice from funders and the Kootenay Livestock Association, a well designed fence with gates now allows cattle to access the water in a couple of suitable locations. The new fence, which encircles the lake, breaks the grazing unit into several pastures or compartments. The lake access points can be shared by adjacent compartments depending on the quality of the grasslands and the season. Cattle can cause damage to lake shores, and these access points were selected because of their ability to withstand the pressure.

Within the perimeter fence, which excludes cattle and off-roaders, volunteers have begun to establish a foot path. For about two hours, Marianne and I led a group of guests around the lake, noting grassland health and diversity and forest issues, and we helped to identify plants and birds. It was reassuring to note the lack of invasive species and quiet solitude. On this mid-afternoon count, normally an inactive period for birds, we observed about 20 species. Seeing a Western Wood Pewee on a nest and hearing the call of the Cassin's Vireo are experiences which will be remembered.

Daryl Calder



image from the Meadowbrook Community Organization Facebook page

Big Tree Hike

June 3



on the way up to Windy Bluff

Two of us met at the College Trail Head in the evening and hiked up through the Cranbrook Community Forest. In the evening, you can hear (and sometimes see) lots of bird and mammal activity.

We went to Windy Bluff first, where we checked to see if the bitterroot plants were blooming. Many different wildflowers were in bloom up there.

Second, we stopped at Mayook Lookout. There we could enjoy the expansive view and sit down on the bench to rest.

Third, we hiked past that twisted snag on the hill to



on top of Windy Bluff

see the Big Tree. The antelope bush had already bloomed (so we missed that beautiful scent it emits) and was beginning to set fruit.



some bitterroot blossoms, closed for the night



the Steeples from Windy Bluff

On the way back through the forest to our starting point we came upon a small group of white tailed deer, something you are more likely to see in the evening than in the middle of the day. The mosquitoes weren't bad at all, and we didn't have to put on sunscreen!

photos and writing by Susan Walp



the Big Tree





Brennan and Ellie share their knowledge about Turtles. Close by were three western painted turtles sunning themselves at the edge of the water.

Jennifer Doll's Grade 2/3 class at Gordon Terrace Elementary became inspired to take on a year long Action Project about Elizabeth Lake when they watched two other classes in action from Rossland District 20, Jubilee Wetlands BioBlitz, and from Ontario school, Sarah Thompson School, Weed Lake Project. The Rocky Mountain Naturalists also influenced their decision to research the creatures and plant topics of their current sign project, which will be going up at Elizabeth Lake in the coming month.

The students ventured down to Elizabeth Lake each Thursday morning over the past six months to explore, observe and hypothesize about the creatures and plants of a wetland right in their backyard. They began researching each topic using the internet, reading books and inviting experts from the Rocky Mountain Naturalists into their classroom to gain more knowledge.



Sidney and Skyler share their knowledge about dragonflies, which stick their wings out to the sides when at rest, and damselflies, which tuck theirs in behind.



Ryatt and Connor share their knowledge about Sideswimmers, also known as Scuds. They are an important food for many wildfowl at the lake.

The nine topics the students learned about were the Muskrat, Badger, Damselfly, Dragonfly, Garter Snake, Western Painted Turtle, Tree Swallow, Bats and Invasive Plants.

Their inspiration led them to a celebration of their learning on Thursday June 7th, 2018, from 10-12, at Elizabeth Lake where they shared their newfound knowledge with passers by, parents, grandparents and Mrs. Henderson's class from T.M. Roberts. Rocky Mountain Naturalists Marianne, Stewart, Frank and his Weed Warrior Crew, Janine and Sarina, assisted with some of the groups in sharing their Naturalist knowledge. Dianne and Joe also attended. It turned out to be a great experience for all involved.

story and photos by Stewart Wilson



Mrs. Doll and her grade 2/3 class

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

BC Big Tree Registry <http://bcbigtree.ca> This site lists the BC champions of various species, among other information.

Botanical names <http://www.winternet.com/%7Echuckg/dictionary.html>

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

Conrad Kain <http://conradkain.com/>

Mystery Photo from spring issue



This House Finch is yellow instead of red because it has been eating a diet high in carotenoids. Seeds give them the minerals and vitamins that they require, but eating certain berries that have a high carotenoid content will influence the pigment of their feathers. Also interesting to note is that the females prefer to mate with the yellow or orange males. You can read all about it here.

<https://books.google.ca/books?id=NcXQCwAAQBAJ&pg=PA101&lpg=PA101&dq=bird+seeds+that+contain+carotenoids&source=bl&ots=k7z0j4QjL2&sig=RuTJFbCTxdUPQvc1d2slzLwgCWU&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjH9dOD5fnYAhVD62MKHTtCBBQQ6AEIdDAM#v=onepage&q=bird%20seeds%20that%20contain%20carotenoids&f=false>

Lyle Grisedale

Mystery Photo

Can you identify this bird?



Alan Barnard

Please send your answer to rmnatskestrel@gmail.com by September 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 by September 1 for the fall issue of the newsletter.

