

The Kestrel

Quarterly Newsletter of the
Rocky Mountain Naturalists
2019 fall equinox



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.

On a sunny July morning, eighteen RMNs joined butterfly specialist Dean Nicholson on the search for a butterfly that is very rare in British Columbia. The Dione copper butterfly (*Lycaena dione*), the largest copper butterfly in North America, was discovered at Confederation Park, near Elizabeth Lake, in 1989. Although it is relatively common east of the Rockies and in the U.S.

Great Plains, the sighting at Elizabeth Lake was the first time that this butterfly had been seen in British Columbia. Three decades later, a few sites in the Cranbrook area remain the only ones where the Dione copper butterfly is



gathering at Elizabeth Lake

found in our province. It is red-listed and considered a species at risk in B.C.

Dean shared information about the Dione copper butterfly with the group, explaining the history of its discovery here and details about its life cycle and habitat. This butterfly lays its eggs, one at a time, on various species of dock, such as the curly dock (*Rumex crispus*) that can be found at Elizabeth Lake. The eggs fall to the ground in the fall along with dried plant material. In spring the eggs hatch and the larvae eat the fresh, new dock leaves before pupating and hatching in the summer as adults. The adult butterflies feed on the nectar of flowering plants such as sweet clover, thistle and alfalfa, all of which are known to grow in the grassy fields at Elizabeth Lake.

We walked slowly down the path from the parking lot behind Elizabeth Lake Lodge toward the concrete bird blind, hoping to catch a glimpse of this elusive butterfly. Dean spotted one very quickly. It was quietly perched on a stalk of foxtail barley, warming itself in the morning sunshine. We all had an opportunity to have a closer look and take a few photos.

Curly dock is considered an invasive weed which would normally be removed, either through pulling, cutting or pesticide use. Dean explained the importance of leaving a few plants, along with the sweet clover that grows near the weir, so the Dione copper butterfly will continue to have the requirements to make its home here. These butterflies are not migratory and usually



Dione copper butterfly

spend their lives in a relatively small area. It is hoped that we will continue to see them at Elizabeth Lake for many years to come. For more information, please click on the following link: [http://www.sgrc.selkirk.ca/bioatlas/pdf/Field Surveys For The Dione Copper Butterfly.pdf](http://www.sgrc.selkirk.ca/bioatlas/pdf/Field%20Surveys%20For%20The%20Dione%20Copper%20Butterfly.pdf)

After this portion of the outing, several members continued on to Helga's meadow in the West Hills to search for other butterflies. Although there were plenty of flowering plants, there weren't many butterflies. However, Dean did find a few, one of which was a lupine blue (*Icaricia lupini*), a butterfly that he has usually found in higher, subalpine elevations. The lupine blue actually has nothing to do with lupines, but

breeds only on wild buckwheat (*Eriogonum* spp.), which is plentiful in Helga's dry meadows. After another hour or so, the outing ended and a few of us remained to chat and enjoy our lunches.

story and
photographs by Helga Knot



lupine blue in the viewing jar

Fernie Ski Hill Fossils and Geology

July 7

On July 7, 2019, a dozen Rocky Mountain Naturalists carpoled to the Fernie Ski Hill to participate in Nature Bob Livesey's guided hike to the Mississippian Era fossil beds. We rode up the quad chairlift, visited Nature Bob's yurt, hiked up the switchback road to the top of the upper inactive chairlift, then, after lunch, explored along the quad trail across the



looking back, halfway up the hike, at Nature Bob's yurt in the middle of the photo and Fernie in the distance



crinoid fossils, blastoid fossils

slope to the 300 million year old limestone layer, all in warm, sunny weather. Bob, and his understudy replacement guide, spent an hour naming and describing the ancient crinoids, blastoids, ammonites and other fossils in the cliff and loose rocks.

Crinoids and blastoids are ancient starfish relatives that lived their adult lives attached to a reef by a stem. They would catch things to eat from passing water currents.



Mississippian period reef fossils



Bob and his assistant also named the local flowers we encountered along the road and path. Bob had to ride on the back of a quad this trip, but his assistant shepherded us slowly and safely back down, under a few drops of spitting rain, to the top of the quad chair for the ride down to the Lodge. My creaky old knees envied Dan's ski

pole wisdom on the hike down the steep trail.

Frank Hastings
story and photos



Knapweed Pull at Elizabeth Lake

August 2

A group of Rocky Mountain Naturalists got together to rid a little area near the turtle beds at Elizabeth Lake of invasive knapweed. People had been trying to control the knapweed on the 20 square meter plot for years. We may well have put an end to it, with many hands making light



Dawn Storgaard

work. The day was hot and sunny, but the work site was in the shade, so the plant pulling was bearable.

Afterwards, we walked along the bed where the turtles lay their eggs. There were some invasive plants growing, so we did our best to clear them out. We also got a close look at the new anti-skunk cages that our turtle crew places around the nests.

Greg reported that, three weeks on, he hadn't seen any knapweed or toadflax (we saw a lot of Dalmatian toadflax there, which we also pulled) growing in the area, so we must have done a thorough job. He thanks everyone who helped that day.

Susan Walp

Lewis's Woodpecker search at Skookumchuck IBA

August 5

About a dozen RM Nats and friends went to check out the good Lewis's Woodpecker habitat at Skookumchuck Prairie Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA) on August 5, 2019. This habitat is between Farstad Road and Moan road on a couple of backroads west of the the Highway and south of the Skookumchuck pulp mill.

Quick background for those not familiar: In 2017, the spring after I took over as volunteer caretaker of the IBA, Joe R. and I found five Lewis's Woodpecker nests during a two-hour drive. This was the first inkling that the habitat, restored through logging and clearing starting in the late 1980s, was proving to be attractive to Lewis' Woodpecker. Since then, we have found dozens of nests:

Number of cavity nests each year

Year	American Kestrel	Lewis's Woodpecker	Total
2016	0	5	5
2017	1	18	19
2018	1	3	4
2019	4	21	25

In 2017 we found 18 woodpecker nests, and this year, 2019, we got a record number of nests - 21 nests. This is likely the highest density of nesting in the province. FYI I am submitting these data to the BC Species Inventory database, which can be viewed here: <http://a100.gov.bc.ca/pub/siwe/details.do?projectId=5527&surveyId=32649&pagerOffset=0>.

Because of this high density, I prefer not to lead field trips into the area in June and July when the adults are busy feeding their growing young in the nest cavities. Some of them get distracted or even very upset when anyone passes by. They will stop foraging and come to investigate you, or they will start making alarm calls and flying about to alert the young in the nest of possible danger. This also upsets nearby pairs, who may come from half a kilometer away to see what is the trouble. All this activity and noise means the young are not getting food, and it can also alert avian predators in the area such as Common Raven, Black-billed Magpie, and Red-tailed Hawk.

Indeed, when you come across any nest of



any bird species, you should not spend too much time nearby, especially if the birds are upset. And you should look around to see if any Common Ravens are flying around because you can be sure they have noticed something interesting, whether you think they are paying attention or not, and they've marked the spot for later investigation when you are not around. You should not go close to nests because the ravens can smell your scent left behind which can lead them right to the nest. They have young to feed too, so I don't blame them for trying.

We had a lovely time on the field trip. Our first stop was to see the beautiful IBA sign erected last year at the Wasa Rest Stop (just north of the junction of the north intersection of Hwy 95A and Hwy 93/95). Then it was off to the main habitat west of the highway. We saw many of the 21 nesting trees and got to see the variety of trees and snags in which the woodpeckers choose to nest. These range from skinny little pine snags only a couple of meters high, to dead-topped half-alive ponderosa pine, to dead or partially dead trembling aspen. In other places in BC, they nest mainly in old cottonwoods but I have also seen them nest in utility poles. We saw six Lewis's Woodpecker, 14 American Kestrel, and 18 other species, including a Sora at the little lake where we stopped to have our lunch in the shade. The field trip was topped off on Green Road by seeing three Common Grackle - an ever increasing species in the Rocky Mountain Trench.

The day's checklist can be viewed here: <https://ebird.org/view/checklist/S58769496>

Dianne Cooper

Lyle Grisedale photographs



Mickinnick Trail Hike

August 7



the shady part if the trail

August 7 in Sandpoint, Idaho, was hot. The high temperature there was 36°, and there was smoke in the air from some forest fire somewhere. It would have been unwise to push ourselves to hike all the way to the top, so we satisfied ourselves with lovely views (if slightly hazy) and a beautiful, well-maintained trail. We can go back and hike the entire 10 km another day.



a cedar trunk with its stringy bark

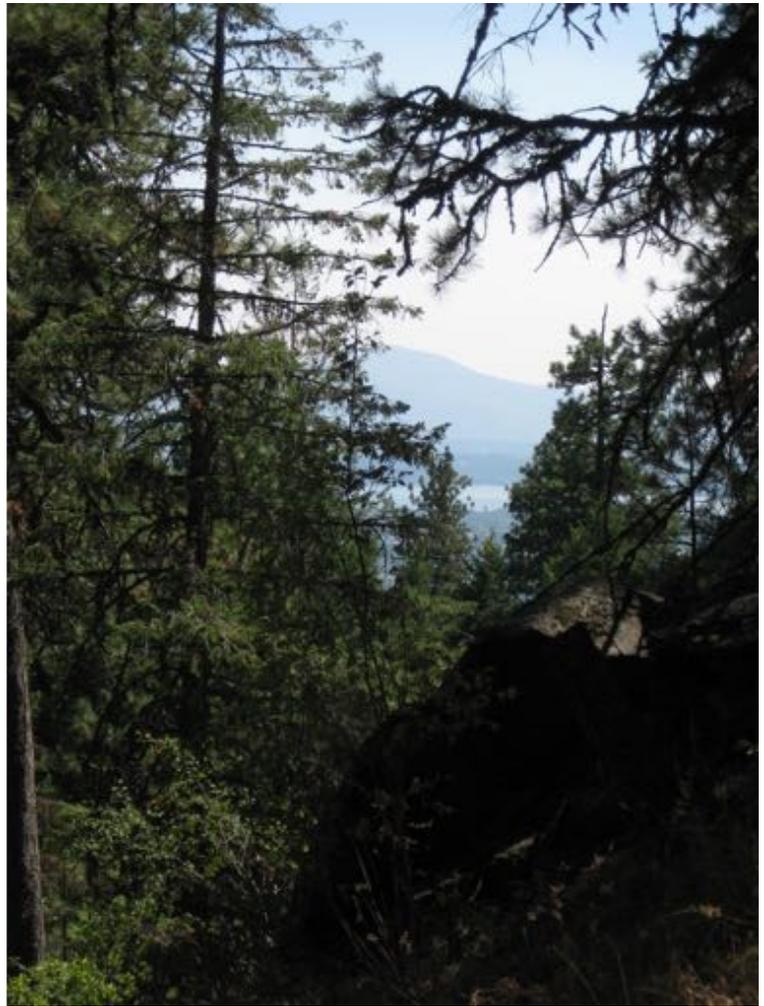


Douglas maple along the trail

We passed through various vegetation types as we gained elevation, hiked across different kinds of ground, and came around to different aspects. We caught glimpses of Lake Pend Oreille through the trees soon after beginning the hike, and there were more expansive views to look at farther up.

As we gained elevation, the temperature fell (but not enough to make us feel like hiking to the top). At about 3 pm, a cool breeze began to blow from the lake! We'll have to try the Mickinnick trail again, though, on a day that's not so smoky.

Susan Walp
photos and writing



Cherry Creek Knapweed Pull

August 17

A big group organized by the Nature Conservancy of Canada met on the Cherry Creek property to pull invasive knapweed. In the local area, what we have mostly is spotted knapweed. Before



Nature Conservancy of Canada

getting to work on this site, the leaders showed us examples of other types of knapweed: diffuse and Russian knapweed.

After the work was done and the property was as clear of knapweed as possible for this group, the leaders gave a tour of the wetlands on this property. They described the digging of ponds and the planting of riparian species that have taken place in an effort to create suitable habitat for various species of wildlife.

Susan Walp



knapweed Gretchen Whetham

Gretchen chose to lead this knapweed pull on Friday 23 August because she knew the plants were still blooming and would be relatively easy to find and pull out. And she was right.

But while there in the Cranbrook Community Forest we also saw a lot of St. John's Wort. It had mostly finished blooming but was easy to find due to its many distinctive seed pods. And there was a lot of it!

No way did we clear the forest of these invasive plants, but we did pull quite a few, filling several bags. After three hours we quit, and our

leader took the bags to the transfer station, where she put the bags in the garbage section.

Susan Walp



in flower tuxgraphics.org



the plant gone to seed

Susan Walp

RM Nats Annual Summer Social

August 25

Twenty-seven RMNs enjoyed an afternoon of activities, delicious food and good company at our



Perry Creek at Wycliffe Regional Park

annual summer potluck on Sunday, August 25th. The weather looked very threatening earlier in the afternoon, with dark and ominous storm clouds racing toward the Rockies and letting loose some torrential showers. Fortunately, the rain stayed on the mountains and we had perfect weather, with warm sunshine and blue skies.

Wycliffe Regional Park offers a number of options for activities, including disc golf, bocce and a hiking trail that loops around the park. Several people chose to give the disc golf a try while others enjoyed a three-kilometer hike around the park and down to Perry Creek, led by Gretchen and Bob Whetham.

We had a picnic site with plenty of tables, a large, covered shelter and a fire pit with dry firewood stacked nearby. We made good use of all the amenities and laid out a potluck



river hike



big mushroom, seen on river hike

banquet of appetizers, salads and desserts to go with the main dishes that members brought along to grill. After dinner a fire was lit in the fire pit and lawn chairs were pulled in close. We enjoyed a relaxing early evening, chatting with friends and savouring the warmth of the flames. Two White-breasted Nuthatches provided entertainment as they flitted around a nest box in a nearby Douglas-fir. Long tree shadows stretched across the lawn as we gathered our things and said our goodbyes.

Thanks to all who attended and made this such an enjoyable day!

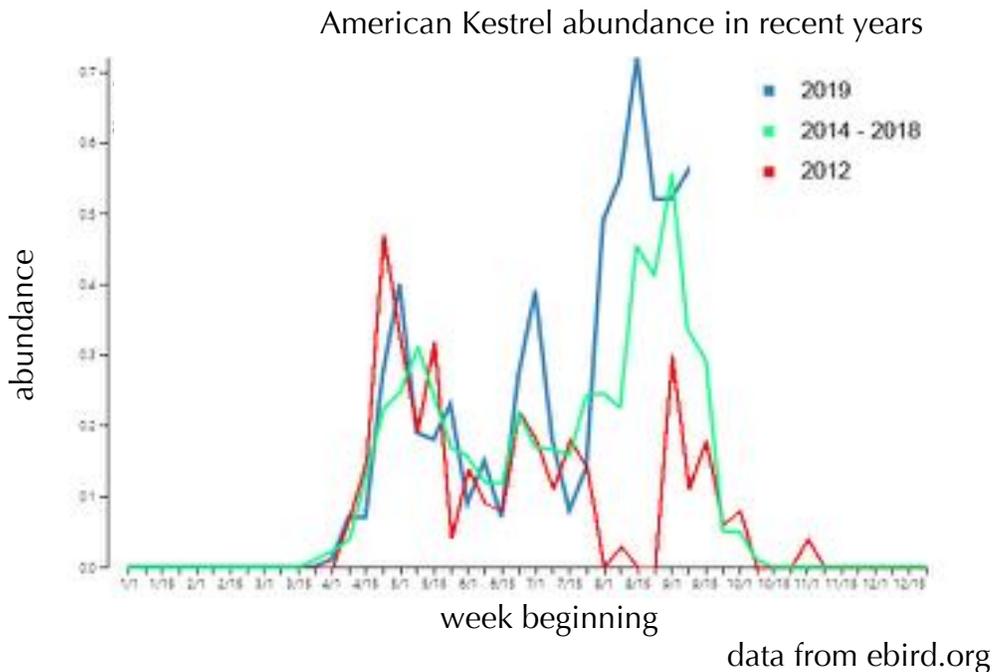
story and photographs by Helga Knote



campfire

Yay! Good Kestrel numbers this year!

Abundance: the average number of birds reported on all checklists; so, for example, you could expect to see 0.70 kestrels on a checklist at the peak in August 2019.



A quick look at the eBird charts for American Kestrel shows that there were indeed more Kestrels around this year, especially in August. The abundance measure was just over 0.70 in 2019. Compare that to the previous five years when the peak was around 0.58 and the extremely poor year of 2012 where the late summer peak was at 0.30.

The peak of the abundance measure for southern BC is generally around 0.45 - much like what we saw from 2014 to 2018.

I have been worried and disappointed in the kestrel numbers recently. Kestrel numbers across North America have been declining but I am extremely happy that there were so many around this year. It appears hatch and fledging has been quite successful this year in the East Kootenays.

Mitchell Warne has spearheaded nest box placement for kestrels throughout Alberta and British Columbia (links below). The places I have been seeing kestrels are not around any nesting box, so the higher numbers must be mostly natural. Maybe the less-dry conditions benefitted them by keeping the insect numbers steady. I hope to see all these fledglings come back next year and keep numbers high in the area.

<https://www.warneinthewild.com/bc-kestrel-nest-box-program>

<https://www.castanet.net/news/Kelowna/255791/Bringing-back-the-kestrel>

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

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

Cranbrook Community Forest <https://www.cranbrookcommunityforest.com/>

Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) <http://www.natureconservancy.ca/en/>

East Kootenay Invasive Species Council (EKISC) <https://www.ekisc.com/>

Bird Observations <https://ebird.org>

About Field Trips

Leader responsibilities:

- Radios and first aid kits are available from Paula.

- 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 mnatskestrel@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

Club Information

Executive

President	Helga Knoté
Vice President	Marianne Nahm
Past President	Virginia Rasch
Secretary	Jim Hurvid
Treasurer	Gretchen Whetham
BC Nature Director	Rob Woods
Director at Large	Wendy Maisonneuve



summer social
Gerry Warner

Committees, Co-ordinators and Representatives

Bats	Scott Bodaly
Bluebirds	Marianne Nahm
Bylaws and Policies	Virginia Rasch
Christmas Bird Count	Dianne Cooper
Club Camp	Jackie Leach
Communications	Virginia Rasch
Early Morning Birding	Jim Hurvid
East Kootenays Invasive Species Council	Frank Hastings
Elizabeth Lake	Stewart Wilson
Field Trips	Paula Rogers
Internal Communications	Paula Rogers
Kootenay Conservation Program	Helga Knoté
Little Big Day	Greg Ross
Membership	Sue Ross
Newsletter	Susan Walp
Presentations	Paula Rogers
Records	Wendy Maisonneuve
Rocky Mountain Trench Society	Jo Ellen Floer
Skookumchuck Prairie IBA	Dianne Cooper
Turtle Monitoring	Greg Ross
Web Masters	Dianne Cooper

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

BC Nature Fall 2019 General Meeting (FGM) and Conference

October 3rd through 5th Pitt Meadows (near Vancouver)

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

Next meetings -	Wednesday	18	September
	Wednesday	20	November