

The Kestrel

Quarterly Newsletter of the
Rocky Mountain Naturalists
2019 summer solstice

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animalspot.net

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.

The first Friday in April saw a solid group of Rocky Mountain Naturalists headed north to a unique region of the Rocky Mountain Trench. This spring tradition is a familiarization exercise to prepare trip leaders for their role in the Wings over the Rockies festival. In recent years, a number of Rocky Mountain Naturalists have volunteered to lead festival guests during International Migratory Bird Week.



Dusky Grouse



Dusky Grouse displaying



Following half a dozen years leading sizeable groups of guests, I endeavoured to transfer guiding duties to fellow RMNats. Fortunately, Gretchen, Bob and Jo Ellen generously took the plunge. Despite initial trepidation, our new leaders appreciated the challenge. It's a rewarding experience to introduce guests to the small things which may be easily overlooked. Thank you, Gretchen, Bob and Jo Ellen. Perhaps, with club support, RMNaturalists can continue to participate in this important festival.

This particular area, the source and outlet of Columbia Lake, provides a glimpse into recent geologic history in the context of dramatic landscapes and important natural attributes.

Back in April, we made five stops near Canal Flats, in the vicinity of the headwaters of the Columbia. The 2000 km long Columbia River begins here, eventually emptying into the Pacific at Astoria, Oregon.

Small delights included a close encounter with a Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Mourning Dove and a Dusky Grouse. A profusion of tiny birds-eye primrose brightened the margins of the springs forming the



Dutch Creek Hoodoos

headwaters.



Dutch Creek Hoodoos

Driving north to the area where Dutch Creek flows east into the Trench, we set out on a 5 km walk. Opportunities to understand grasslands, forest processes and the effects of glaciation provided good discussion topics. Thanks to permission granted by Sue Coy and Lloyd Wilder, we carefully traversed their private land, accessing the most dramatic section of the hoodoo rim. Trail upgrades and



interpretive signage at the Hoodoos enhances appreciation and enjoyment for all.

A couple of white-throated swifts, heard but not seen, had returned to their most northerly



breeding habitat. These small, agile birds migrate to the narrow spaces within the hoodoos, successfully nesting and raising their young.

It is a privilege for Rocky Mountain Naturalists to occupy this spot at the well established Wings Over The Rockies Festival, offering two great hikes.

Daryl Calder

photos by Lyle Grisedale

On a nice spring evening, 15 Naturalists were lucky to visit the home of a local fossil collector, Chris New. He explained how the trilobite fossils were formed and how the local ones compared to other well-known trilobite beds. He shared this website with us. It shows the various geological eras of North America. <https://deeptimemaps.com/north-america-key-time-slices-thumbnails/>

He showed us samples of what various fossils look like when he collects them in the field and how he splits and prepares them for more careful analysis and display. Chris and his collecting friend, Chris Jenkins, worked with the University of Alberta to identify over 25 new species and were fortunate to have trilobites named after themselves, along with one Chris New's daughter found (*Anechocephalus rebecca*).

Chris also showed us his amazing collection of trilobites, some of which were his own and some of which were purchased from places

around the world. Here is a photo of *Anechocephalus intermedius* from his collection.



Chris New

Gretchen Whetham

Turtle Day

May 2



school kids checking out water organisms



showing the kids what's involved in the monitoring program

wetland organisms. A second station taught students key facts about the Western Painted Turtle and its interconnections with the organisms

A successful Western Painted Turtle Day was hosted by the Rocky Mountain Naturalists, with support from the Fish and Wildlife Compensation Program. The cool morning gradually warmed while volunteers set up the sandbox, tent and tables behind the Tourist Information Building at Elizabeth Lake. Sighs of relief were heard from all volunteers as Greg and Katrin finally located five hatchlings from the seriously predated nests.

Soon, the first elementary school class, from one of three schools, Steeples, Pinewood and A'qamnik, arrived to rotate through three learning stations. One was the dipping dock where children excitedly found invertebrates and other



observing some baby turtles



dip netting

in the lake. The third one was led by Greg, who is the Western Painted Turtle Project Coordinator, and Katrin. They spent the day at the sandbox station, which acted as a turtle nesting bed, demonstrating how the female turtle digs a nest to lay her eggs. Information included how and when the hatchlings make their way out of the eggs and into the water. Approximately 100 students participated.

The public event in the afternoon was well attended, with good representation from all age groups. Despite disappointment that there were so few hatchlings, school children and the public were

keen to learn about this vulnerable listed species. Visitors expressed their appreciation on being given the opportunity to learn about the Western Painted Turtle at Elizabeth Lake's Annual Turtle Day.

Close to 20 Rocky Mountain Naturalists cheerfully and enthusiastically volunteered their time to make Turtle Day 2019 a big success.

Marianne Nahm

Stewart Wilson photos



predaceous beetle larva



dragonfly exoskeletons

The Buttes

May 4

On May 4, approximately a dozen club members enjoyed a hike on Twin and Lone Pine Buttes in Wycliffe. We enjoyed the larkspur, balsamroot and yellow bell, to name just a few flowers. The bluebirds and meadowlarks were singing, and the weather was perfect for a morning hike to enjoy nature!

Ruth Goodwin
Bob Whetham photos



spring beauty



shooting star



arrow-leaved balsamroot



woodland star



The Rocky Mountain Naturalists Mildred White Scholarship was presented by Helga Knotte to Elizabeth Whitehouse at College of the Rockies. This award is presented to a student who has completed one year of a post-secondary program at a recognized university, college or technical/vocational school and is planning further post-secondary studies in earth or natural sciences. The student must have attended full-time studies in a natural/cultural heritage or resource management program and must have demonstrated academic achievement.

Gretchen Whetham

Tyler Zhao

Squirrels in Nest Box

May 18

Sometimes squirrels nest in the bluebird nesting boxes. Two jumped out of this nesting box and chased each other around the pole. May 18th photo.

Last year this same nesting box had six pups in it. Maybe these two are from that litter.

Sandy McArthur



Big Tree Hike

May 19

Five Rocky Mountain Naturalists members set out on a Sunday afternoon to check out the Cranbrook Community Forest. The group saw many species of plants, some in bloom and some not. There were badger holes, ground squirrel holes and plenty of interesting things to look at. Birds were active and noisy around the first alkali lake.



avocet nathistoc.bio.uci.edu

We hiked up to the big snag (my name for a big dead Douglas-fir with a lot of holes in the trunk) and then stopped for a rest and a snack when we got to the Big Tree (a veteran ponderosa pine with climbing spikes in the trunk and an old platform up in the tree's canopy). We stayed on the ground for our snack, though.

On the way to Mayook Lookout there was another big snag (the spiral snag), bare of bark so that you can see its spiral grain. From the lookout we could see the lakes in the

community forest, Cranbrook laid out before us and the Purcell Mountains with their snowy peaks beyond.

After coming down we passed by the northern shore of Sylvan Lake. Somebody spotted an avocet, worth 100 points (because it is such a special bird). We saw and heard a killdeer (an interesting shorebird) and many waterfowl. Later on, somebody else saw another avocet (but we don't know if this sighting was worth any points).

Susan Walp



killdeer animalspot.net

Curlews on Skookumchuck Prairie

May 28



These photos are from a recent birding excursion to Skookumchuck Prairie. They show what the Long-billed Curlew looks like.

Helga Knote



Nocturnal Owl Survey

One of the citizen science programs some of our members contribute to is the Nocturnal Owl Survey (NOS). We go out one night in March, driving along a defined route and stopping at specific spots to listen for owls for a specific length of time. This is called a "Point Count Survey", a common method (protocol) whose data can be used to calculate estimates of the population size of the species surveyed. By repeating the same route and stopping at the same spots year over year, the data collected can also be used to calculate changes in population size. We do not simply go out to a spot known to have owls and listen for them. Nor do we drive around an area trying to count every bird such as we do with the Christmas Bird Count. By following the protocol, we create data that can be useful for population estimates.

Routes vary in overall length but are laid out in one direction and stops are at least 1.6 km apart. This minimizes the likelihood of counting the same individual owls more than once.

The three routes I run are Ha Ha Creek (13 stops), Fenwick (11 stops), and Fort Steele-Wardner (17 stops) and cover from 19 to 25 kilometers. I took them over after the passing of the previous co-ordinator, Peter Davidson, who had done these routes for many years.

Running the owl routes is fun, but it is also work. In preparation, we have to know the routes, check them out during daylight to see if the roads are passable and to double-check the written descriptions and gps co-ordinates of each stop, prepare the blank data sheets, load the co-ordinates in a gps device, practice recognizing the different owl calls (each species has a unique call), and schedule a night. On the scheduled night, if it is too windy or rainy, we have to reschedule; since it is often quite windy in March, this happens quite often.

On the night of the survey, we start at a half hour after sunset and can go as long as midnight. We have to navigate to our spots in the dark, hop out and start the timer, stand as still as we can, listen and record owls heard as well as passing vehicles and sources, types, and intensity of other noises. We record the number of each owl species heard as well as the direction and distance to the calling owl. Then hop back in the vehicle, record the data and navigate to the next spot.

RARELY do we actually see an owl, and we cannot search out the owls we hear to shine a flashlight on them because that would take too much time, disturb the owls and negatively impact the accuracy of our count. In the southern interior, we are also not allowed to "use playback" - that is, use a sound-producing device to play owl calls in the hope of getting a response from any owl nearby.

Those are the facts. The fun part is standing out in the middle of nowhere, on a still crisp spring night, in the dark with the stars wheeling overhead, straining to hear anything. Often, you just imagine you hear something. Often, you hear yipping coyotes, near or far, and unknown noises of the forest (could be a bear, could be a deer, or porcupine, who knows!). Some years, you do not hear any owls at all! But that is most unusual. When you do actually hear an owl - most commonly a Northern Saw-whet - you picture in your mind's eye this tiny bird (Saw-whets are $\frac{3}{4}$ the size of a Robin) singing its little heart out to its love and rivals, in the eternal vastness of the universe, and you as witness for your species.



helper Mike Bentley

Dianne Cooper story and photo



The Rocky Mountain Naturalists 2019 spring camp-out was held at Golden Eco-Adventure Ranch in Nicholson, just south of Golden. This large campground hosted 23 of our members in campers, tents, and yurts for three warm and sunny days from May 28 to May 31. Marianne put together a fully packed schedule,

and we all had a great time birding, hiking, paddling and having meals together.

Tuesday night, after everyone arrived, an enjoyable pot-luck was held in a nice large, shady area. Early Wednesday morning birding at the campsite involved a fair bit of wandering over the vast area where we were staying. After breakfast we headed south to Columbia Wetlands Outpost, where some of us rented canoes and got instructions on a circle route that our 13 boats navigated in two hours. The sun was



shining, and there were plenty of birds: many Eastern Kingbirds, Kingfishers and a Bullock's Oriole. A couple of Bald Eagles sat proudly on tree tops watching our progress. A few folks continued to paddle in the afternoon but encountered strong winds. Others went back to the campsite to bike, walk or simply take it easy and relax. A barbecue was held that evening with most folks opting to sit around our picnic area and cook over the open fire. It was warm enough that there was no need to sit around a campfire.



On Thursday morning we drove a few km to a wetland called Reflection Lake, beside the highway. There was a viewing deck, and there were paths along the lake. The highlight that morning was a very close viewing of a Virginia Rail, Marsh Wrens, many Ruddy Ducks and many other types of ducks.



calypso orchid

After breakfast, the group hopped into cars and headed up the Blaeberry River Valley to look for a hiking trail heading south from Thompson Falls. The car shuttle was a bit tricky as this portion of the road is quite narrow and is being actively logged. To be safe it is advisable to follow logging trucks to avoid close encounters with fully loaded logging trucks.

We spent some time exploring the upper falls area and then started the hike downstream in a generally southerly direction. The falls were formed by the Blaeberry River cutting through resistant layers of

Cambrian limestone. Further downstream the river forms a canyon as it cuts through softer shales, possibly of the McKay formation. There were great views into the canyon from along the edge of the trail.

At about the halfway point, the trail cuts down to the level of the river into an abandoned floodplain where we stopped to have lunch. The views were great, and there was an abundance of wildflowers such as mountain avens, paintbrush, yellow ladyslipper and even some round-leaved rein-orchid.

The hike was 7 km in length from the upper falls to the lower parking lot, and it took about three hours for the group to complete the hike.

“Don’t be put off by the awkward steep section at the start, as the trail soon assumes a pleasant grade”. The 2019 Hiking Trail Map “Golden Rules” seemed authentic and honest in all respects; it was time to take a calculated risk. On the evening prior to the Canyon Creek Hike, several Nats hopped onto two wheelers and checked the lay of the land. It appeared that a short distance west of the Eco Camp, three trailheads provided access to a historic gold rush trail. Of course, the most direct and logical route was the awkward, steep one.

On Friday morning following ‘Early Birding’ and packing up, seven of us opted for a spectacular hike along the North Rim of Canyon Creek. Soon the questionable section was behind us, and indeed ‘a pleasant grade’ was assumed.

Built in the late 1800s to provide access for mining activity, the trail is now well signed and maintained by a local bike club. The wide path through the forest was quiet except for variable bird song and subdued roar of the creek far below.

Our leaders signalled that something up ahead was worth a look. A mountain goat billy had just stepped off our trail. Judging by the tracks in the soft earth near a mineral lick, a large goat, small goat and perhaps a bear had been attracted to the trace minerals in the soil.

At noon, while we ate lunch in the shade, five goats could be seen up ahead near the next viewpoint.



red paintbrush



yellow ladyslipper



columbine

We enjoyed observing them as we rested before returning on the same trail.

A couple of dry, smooth impromptu walking poles helped solve the tricky, awkward descent to the parking lot. It was time to say our goodbyes as we headed off in different directions. A fine ending to a memorable Club Camp 2019.



Marianne Nahm, Doug Leach and Jackie Leach
photography by Lyle Grisedale





George Rogers

A small group of Naturalists joined a few members of the Cranbrook Community Forest Society to attend a presentation by Danica Roussy from WildSafe BC on Wildlife Encounter Safety Tips. It was a beautiful warm evening for a short walk in the Community Forest to the Welcome kiosk (on the Gateway Trail) where the very informative presentation took place. Danica shared some relevant facts that we all should be aware of.

The best encounter with a grizzly bear, black bear, wolf, coyote or cougar is the one you can avoid. Make noise, preferably with your voice, and watch for fresh signs such as scat. Before visiting a

provincial or federal park, visit park websites to learn about active wildlife in the area. Learn more about species you might encounter by visiting the species pages on WildSafe BC's website.

You can learn more about bear behavior, and about defensive versus aggressive bear attacks, by watching the "Staying Safe in Bear Country" video or reading "How You Can Stay Safe In Bear Country" by BC Parks. Always keep pets leashed when there is potential to encounter wildlife. Predators may see your pet as a potential threat or prey.

Tips to remember:

1. Bear spray is not a substitute for good common sense. Bear spray has been determined to be an effective deterrent that can reduce injury and potentially save your life. Like a seat belt, it should be considered essential safety equipment when travelling in wildlife country.
2. When purchasing bear spray, check the expiry date. It is good for two years. It should contain 0.5 - 2.0% capsaicin.
3. Check for bumps and dents and for the chain/strap for your safety prior to purchasing.
4. Also purchase white carrying canister and holster (cover optional).
5. When transporting bear spray in a vehicle, place in the white canister with foam (drill small hole in lid to release pressure) and put this into a backpack.
6. Bear spray expands in heat and has potential to explode at 35 degrees.
7. Store in cold, dry place, out of reach of kids.
8. Always carry your holster and bear spray on your dominant side. When biking, place on your chest, non-dominant side, for easy access.

9. To deploy the bear spray, press down on the trigger. Aim to the ground to “build a wall”.
10. When assessing a bear attack, be sure to determine whether it is a defensive or non-defensive attack.

Bear Spray Acronym: SPRAY

S - Stop. Assess the situation.

P - Prepare to spray by putting the index finger of your dominant hand in the loop and steadying the bear spray with your other hand.

R - Remove the safety with the thumb of your dominant hand.

A - Aim at the ground and spray as high as your shoulder (“build a wall”).

Y - Yield (step back and reassess the situation).

Hunters may be at increased risk of a bear attack since they are intentionally moving quietly and are more likely to surprise a bear. Bear spray has been found to be easier, faster and more effective than a firearm at preventing injury and death.

Mountain bikers in bear country should carry bear spray on holsters on their bodies and not on

their bikes. Mountain bikers moving at high speeds can potentially surprise bears on paths where sightlines are poor. Bears may be attracted to paths where berry-producing shrubs thrive.



Danica Roussy

While trail running avoid using headphones. Be vigilant and make noise by occasionally calling out and clapping your hands. Be cautious when travelling downwind or near moving water. If animals cannot smell or hear you, they may be surprised, and this can lead to a defensive attack. Hike with a partner or in a group whenever possible.

Paula Rogers



Paula Rogers

Seven of us met for the trip to Cactus Mountain. We carpoled south on Fenwick Road, parked by the Kootenay River and proceeded to walk up a forestry road to the east. As we walked along we looked at plants and identified birds.

Passing through a barbed-wire fence (the gate was open this day), the road got rougher. We hiked along below the limestone cliffs (where there was a mock orange in full bloom) and passed into a grassy landing. Then we left the road entirely, finding a route up and around until we were above those limestone cliffs. It turned out to be a hot day, so we slowed down and took lots of time to look at neat stuff.

After picking our way through the trees, following game trails from time to time,



bitterroot blossoms among cactus plants
Paula

we came out onto an open slope - and there were the cactus plants! A few of them had what might have been flower buds, but we saw no blooms. However, we were consoled by some bitterroot flowers blooming in a patch of cactus plants.



Paula

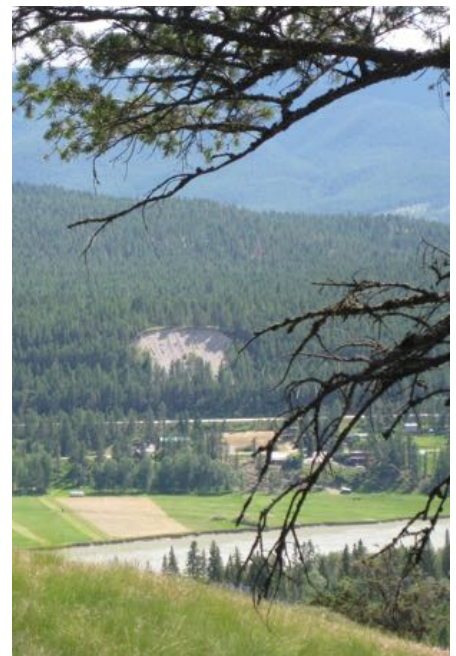


Lyle Grisedale

Coming down from the side of Cactus Mountain, we followed our sense of direction and the occasional game trail, passing, at one point, a ladder leading up a tree trunk to a high chair. Perhaps this was a hunter's roost, but it could have been some wildlife biologist's observation post. After that it wasn't long before we arrived back on our road and

retraced our steps to the place we had parked the cars.

Susan Walp



looking west, across the Kootenay River

Susan

Spring on the Goat Slope

June 16

Wonderful swaths of the lovely *Calochortus apiculatus* or three-spot mariposa lily greeted four hikers on many meadows as we made our way to Beacon Hill. Flowering grasses, a few late blooming balsam root, heart-leaved arnica and bud laden mock orange were some of the plants we enjoyed.



mariposa lily
Lyle Grisedale

Mariposa is Spanish for butterfly. The fan shaped petals suggested a butterfly shape to an early botanist. These three-spot mariposa lilies are found at lower elevations, in forest openings and sunny grasslands. The Ktunaxa dug and ate the starch rich, potato flavoured corms.

A chipping sparrow nest with three bluish green eggs, wreathed with dark brown specks, was discovered right next to our pathway. After viewing the 360 degree view



Holboell's rock cress Lyle



brown-eyed Susan Lyle

and locating some local geographical features, we continued our loop on a well worn bike trail. A light lunch at Marianne and Daryl's place completed our morning outing.



rose Lyle

Marianne Nahm



another mariposa lily Susan Walp

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

Geological Deep Time <https://deetimemaps.com/north-america-key-time-slices-thumbnails/>

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

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

Mickinnick Trail Hike

Trips to hike on this trail will be held on two Wednesdays in August. These are links to three of the many web pages you will find describing this trail. Elevation gain is 600 m, and length is approximately 10 km.

<http://visitnorthidaho.com/activity/second-demo-activity/>

<http://visitsandpoint.com/activity/mickinnick-trail/>

<https://www.alltrails.com/trail/us/idaho/mickinnick-trail--2>

The Mickinnick Trail lies south of the US border, in the state of Idaho, so you will need your passport to get to the trail head. A drive of about two hours will get us to Sandpoint, where we can hike this beautiful trail up the mountainside to look out on Lake Pend Oreille and the surrounding land.

If you are coming, on either of the Wednesdays, August 7 or August 14, please reply to rmnatskestrel@gmail.com.

Susan Walp

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



turtle day

Katrin Powell

Committees and Club Representatives

Internal Communications	Paula Rogers	Bylaws and Policies	Virginia Rasch
Christmas Bird Counts	Dianne Cooper	Invasive Species	Frank Hastings
Elizabeth Lake	Stewart Wilson	Trench Society	Jo Ellen Floer
Membership	Sue Ross	Bluebirds	Marianne
Presentations	Paula, and Marianne Nahm	Turtle Monitoring	Greg Ross
IBA	Dianne Cooper	Field Trips	Paula Rogers
Club Camp	Jackie Leach	Newsletter	Susan Walp
Early Morning Birding	Jim Hurvid		

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 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.

Saturday	6	July	Butterfly walk
Wednesday	7	August	Mickinnick Trail [See previous page.]
Wednesday	14	August	Mickinnick Trail

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

Next meetings -	Wednesday	July	17
	Wednesday	September	18