

The Kestrel

Quarterly Newsletter of the
Rocky Mountain Naturalists
2020 summer solstice



Gordon Ambrose

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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.

Brewery Ridge

March 15

This was a first time for me exploring the Brewery Ridge area. Over the 22 years we've lived here, my husband and I had always continued on up the Wildhorse FSR to other hikes beyond.

Wonderful sunshine, perfect temperatures and a great crew made for a really enjoyable circuit



Fisher Peak peeks over the ridge on the upward trail



hike. Ice grippers were handy first thing while we were hiking up the shaded old logging road, but they came off....along with extra layers....by the time we

on the way up



Lone Peak from Brewery Ridge



The Steeples from Brewery Ridge



Columbia Valley and beyond

started up the steeper section. Some birds were spotted....that I'm sure others would be better at describing than I am. We saw lovely views of the Columbia Valley and Rockies, and to the north even a glimpse of Devil's Hole!

And finally, we saw evidence of lots of interesting old mine history, closer to the trailhead, waiting to be explored another day.

I thank Gretchen and crew for taking me along and showing me there is more to see along the Wildhorse than I knew!

story and
photographs by
Judy Chapman



looking up Wildhorse Canyon



old mine outhouse (I always take shots of outhouses in the wild. One day I'll put together a coffee table book entitled *Loos with Views.*)

Community Forest Walk

May 3

It was the time of year for me to get outside and see what's in bloom, so I set out on a little walk all by myself. I entered the Cranbrook Community Forest on the Sylvan Lake Forest Road, at its southern end, on 2nd Avenue South.

As I passed the First Alkali Lake some Red-winged Blackbirds were calling from the cattails. After turning east, crossing the grassland and hiking through the woods



prairie crocus with closing tepals



prairie crocus with closed tepals



Red-winged Blackbird calling from its perch on the top of a cattail - see it there?



flower buds on the hawthorn

Arbour Trail there were more, on both sides. In fact, there were lots all the way along, some open wider than others; most a light lavender colour, but some almost white and some deep purple; most with six tepals (petals plus sepals, all of which look alike), but some with seven and some with five. At least one had closed its tepals over the yellow center - that's what they

towards Logger's Lane, I crossed the fenceline. A few steps up the Logger's Lane Trail there was a soopolallie shrub in bloom on the south side of the trail. Then, about ten meters farther up the trail, also on the south side, there is a hawthorn that I always like to look at. Its leaves were beginning to expand, and I saw what looked like flower buds. There should be several clusters of white flowers later on in the spring.

As I continued up Logger's Lane there were prairie crocuses on both sides of the trail. On the



bluff, with buttercups in foreground

do after they have been pollinated.

At the junction where the Arbour Trail meets Logger's Lane again you can take a trail down to the west. This trail is called Lower Wizard. (You can find all these trails on the Trailforks website, trailforks.com. There are maps of trails as well as lots of other information.) The Lower Wizard Trail goes downhill from the junction then rises up over a small bluff from which you can see the Big Tree, if you know where to look. (You can see the Big Tree even better from Shemp, a parallel trail just to the north of Lower Wizard.)



mertensia



Oregon grape: spikes of flower buds

That little bluff was covered with bright yellow buttercups. There were a few mertensia plants blooming. I had heard that shooting star blooms were open on the Buttes, so I wanted to see if there were any up on the Lower Wizard bluff (because the habitats are kind of similar). I searched around and found a few rosettes of leaves that might be shooting star plants. Finally, I saw one of these rosettes with a stem rising out of its center. On the stem were several purplish flower buds. I think I found a shooting star!

After that I followed the trail down to the Forest Grove Trail, where I turned south and walked past a big patch of Oregon grape. Quite a few of the plants had little spikes of flower buds. We can look forward to a nice display of yellow blooms later on.

Forest Grove led me back to Logger's Lane. I turned west and retraced my steps back to my starting point. As I passed the First Alkali Lake, there were still a few Red-winged Blackbirds calling from the cattails. And there was one lone, fully-opened shooting star I missed seeing on the way in!

story and pictures
by Susan Walp

Two Bump Loop near Isadore Canyon and Ramparts Rest Area



view from Tabletop: looking across the Rocky Mountain Trench, between Brewery Ridge and Lone Peak, up Wildhorse Canyon

Susan Walp

This hike takes 2-3 hours, depending on pace. Hiking times from point to point are approximate.

From Cranbrook drive towards Wardner. Go about 1 km past the final overpass, down the hill. At bottom of hill, on the right, is a big yellow wildlife sign with a paved pullout. It's across the highway from Gate 1. Park there.

0.00 km Head perpendicular to highway onto old Trans Canada Trail (TCT). Look for pressure treated cattle guard and posts with diagonally cut tops. (Make sure to take this trail, not the dirt road.) Cross rutted meadow and look for post on other side. Walk 6 minutes.

0.37 km Turn right where two parallel logs on the ground mark the new trail. Walk 14 minutes. (After about 13 minutes you'll cross an old quad trail - pay attention now for your next turn.)

- 0.96 km Turn right. Look for rock cairns and orange ribbon on a tree. Walk for 2 minutes, keeping the old fence on your left.
- 1.00 km Turn Left. See an orange and then a pink ribbon. Head gradually uphill with an old fence on your left.
- 1.30 km After 7 minutes you will see another trail merging in from your left. Turn sharply right at a cairn and head uphill, on a sometimes-faint trail, about 10 minutes to the top of Steeple View. There's a bench, and there are nice views. Look south to see two bumps. The bump on the east, called Tabletop, is the more barren-topped of the two. That will be your next goal. Descend back to trail.
- (1.50 km at top)
- 1.68 reach old trail Turn right, heading southwest. Go around two big fallen trees (left trail is better worn) past rockpile at 1.96 km and up to Chief Isadore Trail after 7 minutes.
- 2.03 km Reach Chief Isadore Trail. Turn left and walk along past 8 km trail marker for about 8 minutes.
- 2.29 km Watch for aspen stand on right. There's a pink ribbon on left, on a fence, just before the aspens on the right. Turn right down the bank, beside some old railway ties. Go through scrub to game trail going up. Trail improves in 20 meters. Please don't clear this junction – afraid of dirt bikers finding it. Follow game trail up through gap between East (Tabletop) and West Bumps.
- 2.79 km After 15 minutes you should be well into the gap. Look for a rock cairn. Turn left and circle behind Tabletop on a good game trail. (There is another game trail up West Bump from this junction.)
- 2.95 km After 5 minutes, turn left at a cairn. Go up a short steeper trail to shoulder. Follow the shoulder up to the summit of Tabletop. Nice views! From summit retrace your steps until you reach game trail. It takes about 5 minutes to go up and 3 minutes to come back down.
- (3.11 at top)
- 3.27 km Turn left onto the game trail and follow it, mostly gradually downhill, for about 7 minutes.
- 3.55 km Turn left onto a steeper downhill game trail, crossing another one, and reach Chief Isadore Trail at the kiosk after 3 minutes.
- 3.70 km Follow gravel Rampart Loop Trail back towards Rest Area. Watch for an information sign about white-tailed deer, entitled "quick prey", reached in about 7 minutes.

- 4.14 km Just past that sign turn left onto old TCT, marked with posts. You'll veer west then north then west onto a sloped meadow.
- 4.83 km After 11 minutes reach the picnic table in the meadow. Continue northwest along TCT, veering to the right after the table.
- 5.45 km After 9 minutes you'll see a faint Y-fork. Veer left here and also at the next fork, within 1 minute, to stay on old TCT.
- 5.72 km (After 3 more minutes you will pass, on your left, the two parallel logs marking the trail you originally took at the loop's beginning.) Go straight for another 6 minutes.
- 6.00 km Reach starting point.



looking north from Tabletop

Gretchen Whetham

When you stand on Steeple View and turn your back to the highway, you'll see many bumps on the far side of the Chief Isadore Trail. There is a near pair, just a bit higher than Steeple View, the two bumps separated by a notch. The bump on the left (southeast) is fairly grassy on top. That is Tabletop, the second bump on this loop.

The two-bump loop goes up Steeple View (bump #1) and then heads westerly to Chief Isadore Trail, then goes left (southeast) and then gradually up a game trail through the notch between the small bumps. After the notch it continues behind Tabletop (bump #2) and up a nice shoulder on the south flank of Tabletop. Then you go back down to Chief Isadore Trail further southeast and cross it at the kiosk on the Ramparts Loop. Use that paved trail partway back towards Rampart Rest Area parking, then cut off on the old TCT to get back to where you started.

Each of these bumps makes a nice shorter hike on its own. Steeple View can be accessed from the paved pullout across from Gate 1, and Tabletop, from Ramparts Rest Area.

Gretchen Whetham



at 2.29 km: aspen grove on the right and pink ribbon on left, marking the turnoff from Chief Isadore trail to the notch leading around behind Tabletop
Gretchen Wetham



view from Tabletop towards the Rockies

Gretchen



Two-bump Loop map made with Gaia GPS app

Trillium (*Trillium ovatum*, "Wake Robin")

It is always exciting to find trillium plants in May in the East Kootenay. There are only a few areas that have suitable conditions for this member of the lily order to grow in our region. The trillium needs rich, very moist soil in lowland forests.

Trillium is a perennial plant with a height of 20 to 45 centimetres and a single white blossom. As the name suggests, the plant has three petals, three leaves and three sepals. The blossom turns from pure white to pink as it ages.

The trillium reproduces from both rhizomes and seeds. The seeds are rich in oil and favoured by ants and mice. They carry the seeds to their nests, helping to disperse seed for new plants. Under optimal conditions, it takes 7 to 10 years for a trillium plant to reach flowering size. This is a good reason not to be picking the trillium blooms.

The Nlaka'pmx, previously known as the Interior Salish people, in southern BC, made an eye medicine from the trillium root.

Common names for our species are Pacific trillium, western trillium, western white trillium and western wake robin.

Trillium plants grow elsewhere, too. A different trillium species, *Trillium grandiflorum*, is the official flower symbol of Ontario.



Locations where we have found trillium are Mineral Lake area, mouth of Lamb Creek on Moyie Lake and the south end of Munroe Lake. Hope you will be able to find these lovely white flowers next spring in the Moyie area when you are out exploring.

Marianne Nahm

calflora.org



parfaitimage.com

The Annual Blooming of the Balsamroot



Every spring we look forward to the blooming of our grassland flowers, especially the balsamroot. Once the snow is gone and the first crocus flowers appear we know that soon the hillsides and the grasslands will be ablaze with the brilliant yellow flowers of the balsamroot.



This plant, also known as arrowleaf balsamroot (*Balsamorhiza sagittata*), is a member of the aster family. It flourishes on the south facing hillsides and on the grasslands throughout the East Kootenay and the Okanagan.

Balsamroot was an important food crop for the local First Nations. They looked forward to harvesting it after a long winter and when other food sources were scarce. It offered an important source of carbohydrates. All parts of balsamroot can be eaten: the leaves can be steamed or eaten raw; the taproots can be dried, roasted or steamed; and the seeds can be pounded for use as a flour or eaten whole. First Nations peoples managed the crop by leaving the “mother” roots which could be as big as a person’s forearm and several decades old. Women always dug the balsam root with root-digging sticks made of wood or antlers. The preferred size of root to dig was about that of a carrot. Once dug, the roots were cooked, dried and stored. The roots were pit cooked for hours. They contain an inedible carbohydrate called inulin, but once cooked this turns to edible fructose.

The roots had medicinal uses: they could be boiled to produce resin used as a poultice for burns and cuts. Several rituals were associated with the preparation of balsamroot. One tradition, according to the ethnologist James Teit, was for young people to offer a prayer when eating balsamroot for the first time each season.

So mark your calendar to head into the Kimberley Nature Park and visit Sunflower Hill or make a trip to the Wycliffe Buttes to take in one of Mother Nature's great performances next spring. The month of May is the best time.

Bank Swallow Survey

Swallows have been back in the Kootenays for several weeks now, and among them are Bank Swallows. These agile little birds nest in burrows in banks and sandy cliffs and will even nest in gravel and sand piles at construction sites. They dig the burrows themselves, using their feet, wings and bills. Bank Swallows have been in steep decline since the 1970s, and their numbers have plummeted by more than 98% since then, the steepest decline of any bird in Canada. They are included in "Common Birds in Steep Decline," a list of 33 common species compiled by scientists from the North American Bird Conservation Initiative.



Bank Swallow colony on the Wardner-Ft. Steele Road

Helga Knote



Bank Swallow carrying nesting material

One of the groups gathering baseline information about Bank Swallows is right here in the Kootenays: the Kootenay Bank Swallow Survey. The Survey gathers statistics from eBird as well as from volunteers who send information directly to the team, using a simple data sheet. The Rocky Mountain Naturalists include a large, active and knowledgeable birding community. Our members have been invited to participate in

the Kootenay Bank Swallow Survey. The Survey's past newsletters are available for download at <https://kootenayconservation.ca/KCPStewardship/swallows-breeding/>, along with information about Bank Swallows in our area and a data sheet that can be used to submit a report to the Survey team.

If you are out birding and come across a colony of Bank Swallows, or a roosting or foraging site,



a closer look at those swallows

Helga

you are encouraged to record and report your findings. Participation is voluntary, and you can do it as often or as infrequently as your birding activities allow. Volunteers are an important source of information that may be used to identify critical habitat and inform future decisions about protections under the Species At Risk Act. June and July are the most important months for gathering survey data, so now is a great time to become involved! All the information you need is on the website mentioned above. If you have any questions, please contact Janice Arndt at kootenaybankswallows@gmail.com. Happy birding!

Helga Knote

Migration of Loons and Other Birds

The quiet days of February have passed, and each week the number of birds observed in the East Kootenay increases. Some birds, of course, remain in our area throughout the year. Many of these are formally recorded during the Christmas Bird Count. Some species leave this area in search of suitable habitat at higher elevations or further north.

The migrations of birds were probably among the first natural phenomena to attract the attention and intrigue the imagination of humans. Records date back nearly 3000 years, and this



Common Loon on floating island at New Lake:
female on nest, May 30

phenomenon is the accepted sign of the imminence of spring and of warmer weather. Aristotle, naturalist and philosopher of ancient Greece, (384- 322) was one of the first to discuss the subject of bird migration.

Migration makes it possible for some species to inhabit two different areas during the seasons when each area presents favorable conditions.

The mysteries of migration were not fully understood until the advent of techniques to mark birds. Bird ringing or bird banding is the attachment of a small, individually numbered metal or plastic tag to the leg or wing of a wild bird to enable individual identification. This

helps in keeping track of the movements of the bird and its life history. Storks injured by arrows traceable to African tribes were found in Germany in 1822 and constituted some of the earliest evidence of long distance migration in European birds.

In North America, John James Audubon and Ernest Thompson Seton pioneered the marking of birds way back in 1805 and 1882. Banding schemes were established in the early 1900s, and in 1909 the American Bird Banding Association was founded.

Certain bird species are, for various reasons, unsuitable for ringing. In this area, American Dippers are dangerously handicapped by ringing because the rings induce drag that makes it extremely difficult for them to catch prey in fast-flowing water.

A marked bird can be reported through the North American Bird Banding Program, either online or by toll-free call.

For those of us who report to eBird and/or follow the list of recent sightings in the East Kootenay, May 5th was the first day this year when 100 or more bird species were recorded. Later in the month, several daily counts exceeding 100 were also celebrated. The migrants had returned!

One in particular, the Common Loon (*Gavia immer*), is a medium distance migrant. Common



female loon nesting on grassy log at Munroe Lake, May 23

Loons (COLO) require clear, unpolluted water in order to see and catch fish. In Western Canada, during spring, they move to clear northern lakes to breed, and in fall they return to Pacific coastal waters. While some migrating birds fly at night and feed and rest during the daytime, the loon does not fly or feed at night.

The Canadian Lakes Loon Survey is supported by volunteer participants, including a few RMNats. 38 years of CLLS data from over 1500 lakes help to explain why COLO are producing fewer chicks. A new study found that declines in the number of loon chicks in Ontario over the past 4 decades may also apply elsewhere in Canada. These declines likely result from a complex interplay between damage from acid rain, mercury in fish and climate change. A research paper from 2013, concerning these declines in Canada, is at <https://www.ace-eco.org/vol8/iss1/art1/>.

Human activity, particularly motorboats, can disturb loons on breeding lakes. Volunteer monitors, including Marianne and I, carefully observe 3 local lakes at least 3 times each spring and summer. By canoe, kayak or on foot, we look for adults, evidence of nesting and numbers of chicks - without disturbing these wonderful birds.

If you would like to help survey loons, have a look at this website: <https://www.birdscanada.org/bird-science/canadian-lakes-loon-survey/>.

Daryl Calder story and photos

South Star Spring

June 12

After weeks of no outings due to the Covid-19 Pandemic, 10 Naturalists spent a sunny afternoon checking out the flowering plants and the calling birds at South Star Recreation Trails. Easy Street, Snow Creek and Shady Lane produced many visual and aural delights.

Both field and rosy pussytoes greeted us parallel to Easy Street, along with patches of blue violets. The white blooms of Canada violets were observed in a shadier habitat. After walking into the more closed canopy of Snow Creek, we discovered meadow rue, and there were several groups of *Calypso bulbosa*. Due to our cool, damp spring, these fairyslipper orchids (or, if you prefer, calypso orchids) have had a long flowering season.



getting a good shot of *Calypso bulbosa*

Hilary Anderson

Lyle kept a list of birds which he mainly identified by ear. Most people were able to view and identify the Dark Eyed Junco and Swainson's Thrush. The thrush was foraging in forest litter.

Thank you for an interesting afternoon enjoying nature together.

Marianne Nahm

Ladyslipper Orchids



These mountain ladyslipper orchids were found growing in a ditch along St. Mary Road, Saturday 13 June, and photographed by Lyle Grisedale.



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

Bank Swallows <https://kootenayconservation.ca/KCPStewardship/swallows-breeding>

Bird Observations <https://ebird.org>

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

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

Loon survey <https://www.birdscanada.org/bird-science/canadian-lakes-loon-survey/>

Trailforks trailforks.com

About Field Trips

Radios and first aid kits are available from Paula.

Leader responsibilities:

- 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

Club Information

Executive

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



Committees, Co-ordinators and Representatives

Bats	Scott Bodaly	bank full of swallow burrows
Bluebirds	Marianne Nahm	2020 Kootenay Bank Swallow Survey newsletter
Bylaws and Policies	Virginia Rasch	
Christmas Bird Count	Dianne Cooper	
Club Camp	Jackie Leach/Ruth Goodwin	
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	Marianne Nahm/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 There are no events planned at the present time. Watch your inbox for postings regarding events.

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

Next meetings -	Wednesday	15	July	(possibly - watch your inbox)
	Wednesday	16	September	(we hope)