

The Kestrel

Quarterly Newsletter of the
Rocky Mountain Naturalists
2022 fall equinox



Neal Weisenberg

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.

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Solstice Social Weiner Roast

June 21

Wycliffe Regional Park, a recreational gem located between the communities of Kimberley and Cranbrook, was the venue for our Solstice Day weiner roast honouring Dianne Cooper for a BC Nature Club Award. Dianne is a stalwart member of the Rocky Mountain Naturalists, often working quietly behind the scenes on projects related to furthering knowledge and understanding of birds and other aspects of nature.

Thirty-three people enjoyed connecting with fellow naturalists at this event. After the weiner roast and cookies, Marianne told the gathering about some of Dianne's professional experiences and how she became a member of the Rocky Mountain Naturalists upon returning to Marysville with her family more than two decades ago. Marianne then read our Club's nomination essay which Helga wrote and submitted to BC Nature. Dianne was presented with a lovely hand turned wooden bowl. This gift from BC Nature was in appreciation for the extensive volunteer work Dianne does to help us know nature and keep it worth knowing.

Marianne Nahm and Daryl Calder



Dina Hanson

A Season on a Bluebird Trail

May – August 2022

When I volunteered this past spring to take over one of the many Bluebird Trails monitored by our club, I didn't realize what a rewarding learning experience it would be, especially for someone new to birding.

My trail is in the Wycliffe area off of Pighin Road and has 16 nest boxes, spaced at least 50 metres apart on fence posts overlooking open fields on private property. The boxes had been checked and spring cleaning done in March. In the last week of May I visited the trail for the first time, mentored by Marianne, to learn the procedure and data to be recorded.

The first thing I learned is that there is competition for the boxes, mainly between bluebirds and Tree Swallows. Tree Swallows start nesting later than



Bob Whetham



Stewart Wilson

female with 5 or 6 newly hatched chicks, June 12, Pighin Road



Stewart

June 12, Pighin Road



Stewart

week old nestlings with one unfertilized egg

bluebirds and may try to take over existing bluebird nests, so eggs of both species might be found together. Tree Swallow (TRSW) eggs are white, and bluebird, both Mountain (MOBL) and Western (WEBL), eggs are blue. Both have an incubation period of 12-14 days, and up to 7 chicks will fledge in about 20 days.

On May 24, there was lots of activity already in progress. Bluebirds had occupied 5 of the boxes. They build nests of grass and other plant material and sometimes animal hair or fur. Two boxes already had feathered chicks approximately 1 1/2 weeks old. Another nest had 3 brand new chicks and 3 unhatched eggs. Two others had females roosting in the nests. Seven boxes had TRSW nests under construction. They build the most beautiful nests of grass, fully lined with feathers. We observed one pair of TRSW mating in flight – quite a feat!

Over the next 2 months, I checked the boxes about every week and a half, keeping track of the number of boxes used by which species, number



Stewart

May 28, Pighin Road
I guess this nestling thought that I had brought food when I lifted the lid off the bird box to check up on the nestlings.
[These are White-breasted Nuthatch chicks.]



Stewart

female with newly hatched chicks early July, Pighin Road

of eggs hatched and number of chicks surviving and fledged. It was always an interesting experience to anticipate what might be seen in the boxes on each visit. And I was always happy to see successful fledgings and no unhatched eggs or dead chicks remaining in the nest. Two of the boxes had successful second nestings of MOBL, probably by the same pair. The birds are very tolerant of the inspections and the noise of the drill removing the roof. On one occasion, I mistakenly removed a nest that I thought had been abandoned,

and then realized that a pair of TRSWs nearby had only just completed it! They forgave me and by my next visit had re-built it and laid some eggs.

Tragedy struck in early July as 3 nests of TRSW feathered chicks all died. This could be due to several reasons, most likely being extreme heat and a decreased availability of insects. Parent birds will abandon the nest if they are unable to find enough food for both themselves and the chicks. A parent bird may also be taken out by a local bird of prey, or the chicks may be killed by a predator attacking the nest. On another trail in the area, Peggy reported finding 5 bluebird chicks, healthy and close to fledging, having been killed by deliberate pecks to the heads. Research by



Stewart Wilson

Western Bluebird chicks almost ready to fledge, around 3 weeks old
May 28, Pighin Road

Marianne revealed that this could have been done by House Wrens, Tree Swallows or other bluebirds. Chicks or adult birds can be killed when there is serious competition for the nesting site, especially at the beginning of the season. Of interest, House Wrens may also occupy the boxes, and the male wren often builds several dummy nests, filling several entire boxes with twigs but then using only one box that meets with the approval of the female.

Over the course of the summer it was interesting to observe not only the effects of weather changes on the success or failure of nestings, but also the presence of other field and predatory bird species. In addition, it was interesting to observe the seasonal changes in plant and insect species and the food sources they provide; on my last visit, for example, every step created an explosion of grasshoppers. Badger holes were also evident in one location.

On August 22, I did my final check for the season. Of 15 nestboxes used, 6 were used by bluebirds (2 with second nestings in the same box), producing a total of 35 successful fledgings. Nine boxes were used by Tree Swallows, with a total of 27 chicks fledged and a much higher mortality rate of chicks.



Stewart Wilson
Tree Swallow emerging from bird box at
Elizabeth Lake (June 8)

The data from each of the Bluebird Trails are tallied and sent to the Club's coordinator, Marianne. She then gathers the data and sends the summary to the BC Bluebird Society, to be included in their annual data collection. The Rocky Mountain Naturalists currently oversee 26 active routes in the area. The occupancy rate of the boxes over the past 7 years has been 85-90 %. In 2021 there were 570 WEBL fledgings, 277 MOBL, and 299 TRSW fledgings. Nestboxes may also be used by Violet-green Swallows, chickadees, nuthatches, House Wrens, chipmunks and squirrels. Stewart has provided a photo of some White-breasted Nuthatch chicks, which were an unexpected surprise.

So, in summary, without the investment of time and energy in monitoring and maintaining the Bluebird Trails, there would be a lot fewer birds finding adequate nesting sites. I am thankful to be able to be a part of this conservation effort. Thanks to all the monitors for their time and effort and also to those building and maintaining the boxes. Anyone interested in more information can visit the BC Bluebird Society website at <http://www.bcbluebirds.org/>.

Betty Baker

Bummers Flats Pollinator Meadow Restoration Project

Eight Rocky Mountain Naturalists participated in the July 21 native seed collection workshop and four attended the August 18 event as part of the restoration project described below. We collected ripe seeds from a variety of plants at the Old Kimberley Airport site near TaTa Creek and at Bummers Flats. Some of the target plants were silky lupine, timber milk-vetch, diffuse daisy, northern bedstraw, yellow penstemon, spikelike goldenrod, yarrow, lemonweed (puccoon), nodding onion, thread-leaved daisy, showy daisy, fuzzy-tongued penstemon, and hairy golden-aster.

The project description below is written by KinSeed Ecologies

The Bummers Flats Pollinator Meadow Restoration project aims to create a biologically diverse and functioning herbaceous plant community to attract a wide range of native pollinators and discourage invasive species. The project is situated on the



flickr.com

silky lupine



Marianne Nahm

listening attentively to directions
from KinSeed

Bummers Flats Conservation Land, 6km north of Fort Steele. The study site is a levee that has significant populations of spotted knapweed and Russian knapweed. Repeated treatments over a period of at least 15 years have been required to manage invasive plants. The project aims to



science.halleyhosting.com

yellow penstemon

re-establish a native plant community which can compete with the continued influx and persistence of invasive plants. Facilitating a resilient plant community is imperative for the long-term ecological success of the site. Through seeding and planting native flower species, pollinator habitat will be enhanced by providing nectar, pollen, and nesting resources for listed pollinators such as the Western Bumblebee and the Silver-spotted Skipper, as well as numerous other native pollinators. Plant pollinator associations and the habitats that support these relationships is a critical, foundational ecological system threatened by invasive species, habitat degradation and climate change.

Approximately one hectare of a formerly herbicide sprayed levee at Bummers Flats will be planted, monitored, and



Marianne Nahm

showing off the native seeds collected at the Old Kimberley Airport near TaTa Creek, August 18



flickr.com

diffuse daisy

(<http://www.kinseed.ca/>, Bren Beckwith and Valerie Huff), and the activity is co-ordinated by Ella Both, Ecosystem Biologist, Kootenay/Boundary Region, Ministry of Land, Water and Resource Stewardship. A number of the seed collectors hope to participate in the planting of the seed on the Bummers Flat Levee in early October.

Marianne Nahm

adapted over 5 years following a rigorous experimental design. The Bummers Flats Pollinator Meadow Restoration project is the first of its kind in the region and aims to provide an innovative approach that will inform future restoration efforts that address invasive plant management and pollinator habitat enhancement.



flickr.com

spikelike goldenrod



fieldguide.mt.gov

fuzzy-tongued penstemon

Art Gruenig's Contributions

Art Gruenig contributed much to nature in the East Kootenays. He died on September 14, and we remember him with fondness and gratitude. Art expanded the bluebird trails project (see Betty's article on page 3) many years ago, when he and his wife Lois joined Rocky Mountain Naturalists. Over the years since, he built more than 4,000 bluebird boxes in his workshop. His design for these boxes was intended to be best for the birds and for the volunteers who take care of them, with removable tops to make it easy to check on the nesting process.

As well as receiving Canada's Meritorious Service Cross in May 2021 (see article by Marianne in *The Kestrel*, [www.rockymountainnaturalists.org/uploads/2/8/5/3/28530115/2021_smmr_\[c\].pdf](http://www.rockymountainnaturalists.org/uploads/2/8/5/3/28530115/2021_smmr_[c].pdf), page 10), he was awarded Cranbrook's Citizen of the Year award in 2010. He had also started the Painted Turtle Project at Elizabeth Lake, which continues to this day. Now we still have Turtle Day each spring (see [www.rockymountainnaturalists.org/uploads/2/8/5/3/28530115/2019_smmr\[rl\].pdf](http://www.rockymountainnaturalists.org/uploads/2/8/5/3/28530115/2019_smmr[rl].pdf), page 7, for example.), and Greg and friends still take care of the turtle beds. Art was a great communicator, talking about the turtle and the bluebird projects with school kids and the public and showing what he was doing.

Susan Walp - from newspaper articles contributed by Dave Humphrey



Townsmen file photo

Art Gruenig at 2014 Turtle Day

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

For reporting invasive plant species <https://bcinvasives.ca/take-action/report/>

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

Bird Observations <https://ebird.org>

Bluebirds <http://www.bcbluebirds.org/>

St. Eugene <https://www.steugene.ca/en/about-us-culture-heritage/>

Turtle Day <https://fwcp.ca/project/enhancing-habitat-for-non-game-species/>

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

About Field Trips

Leaders:

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.

At present, the Club is not facilitating carpooling. Our non-COVID practice is below.

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.

Group size will be limited to 10-12.

No dogs on field trips, please

Events and Activities

These are the events planned at the present time. Watch your inbox for notices of events and activities, or check the calendar on the website.

Early Morning Birding
Kootenay River Paddle

Wednesday mornings
Sunday 25 September

See RMN Calendar on our website.
See RMN Calendar on our website.

Club Information

Executive

President	Marianne Nahm
Vice President	Hilary Anderson
Past President	Helga Knoté
Secretary	Theckla Sawicki
Treasurer	Judy Brunner
BC Nature Director	Stewart Wilson
Director at Large	



September 7 executive meeting

Committees, Coordinators and Representatives

Bats	Scott Bodaly
Bluebirds	Marianne Nahm
Bylaws and Policies	Gretchen Whetham
Christmas Bird Count	Dianne Cooper
Club Camp	Jackie Leach/Ruth Goodwin
Communications	Susan Walp/Gerry Warner
Early Morning Birding	Daryl Calder
East Kootenay 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	Hasi Oates
Newsletter	Susan Walp
Personal Information/Privacy	Jim Hurvid
Presentations	Marianne Nahm/Paula Rogers
Records	Helga Knoté
Rocky Mountain Trench Natural Resources Society	Jo Ellen Floer
Skookumchuck Prairie IBA	Dianne Cooper
Turtle Monitoring	Greg Ross
Upper Columbia Basin Environmental Collaborative	Emma DeGroot
Webmasters	Dianne Cooper

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

Next meetings -	Wednesday	21	September	6:30 pm - Idlewild
	Wednesday	16	November	7:00 pm
	Wednesday	18	January 2023	7:00 pm - AGM and regular meeting