The Kestrel

Quarterly Newsletter of the
Rocky Mountain Naturalists
2023 winter solstice

Frank Hastings

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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Butterfly in the Fall Garden October 6

Looking outside at all that white it's hard to believe that last week we were running around in sandals, and all the flowers were in bloom. On one of those days, October 6, I was working in the garden when a Painted Lady butterfly came to visit. Needless to say that I was surprised.

Seeing Painted Ladies in the Okanagan is not uncommon, but this is the first one I've seen in this area, the East Kootenays, and especially this late in the season.

Claude Rioux

St. Eugene Mission Outing October 19

Ten of us met on a cool, sunny morning, which warmed up during our two hour walk by the St. Mary River to the hoodoos on the Big Bend.

Stewart Wilson gave a brief history of the area which included some background information about the Ktunaxa people, a shortened account of the Ktunaxa Creation Legend and the

Stewart Wilson

fall colours along the St. Mary River

Stewart

a beaver's work! There are four beaver dams on a side channel of the river.

Stewart

a chipmunk enjoying the fruits of nature

history of the residential school, which closed in 1970. In the early 1990s a referendum was held to determine the future of the building, after much discussion among the 1,500 members of the five indigenous bands. They voted overwhelmingly in favour of restoration. Why not check out the website steugene.ca and click on Discover to find out more about the history of St. Eugene Mission?

Doug Storgaard
gravel bar below the hoodoos at the Big Bend on the St. Mary River

During our walk 10 species of bird were seen including a Black-capped Chickadee, crows, a Bald Eagle, Northern Flicker, Canada Geese, Common Goldeneyes, a Belted Kingfisher, Mallards, Common Mergansers, and a Red-breasted Nuthatch. One of the highlights was venturing down onto the gravel bar below the hoodoos and looking across the river to an eagle's nest, which appeared as large as a VW Beetle.

Dawn Storgaard
glorious sunshine

We were fortunate to have an almost cloudless sky throughout our walk. As we walked back along the St. Mary River against a backdrop of Fisher Peak and the Steeples with cottonwoods and larches in their golden fall colours, there were many positive comments about how fortunate we are to live in such an area of outstanding beauty.

Stewart Wilson

Planting Cottonwood Stakes at Elizabeth Lake November 1

On the first day of November, a lovely, mild, calm day; 16 keen, skilled volunteers met on the Elizabeth Lake Conservation property. The goal was to plant almost 100 cottonwood stakes that had been cut and prepared the week before in the Lumberton area.

Stewart Wilson

making a plan before we began - equipment and supplies in the foreground

Realizing that using a bar to punch 50-centimetre holes into the soil near the lakeshore would be a very tiring job, we rented a hammer drill, generator and a 2 foot [1 m] bit. The four plots were marked out and the tall grass mowed the day before. Volunteers carried or wheel barrowed materials to the work site. The drill, with a strong operator on one end, bored the holes; the stakes were inserted, tamped, watered and mulched with chips left over

Stewart

digging the holes with the hammer drill and 2 foot bit

Marianne Nahm

After finishing 3 plots, there were enough stakes, fencing and energetic volunteers to complete one more plot.

Stewart Wilson

placing the stakes in the ground and tamping gently around each one so the soil contacts the wood

from last year's planting project.

Next, each plot was fenced using 7 foot [2 m] t-bar posts and deer resistant plastic mesh. Now we await spring and bud break.

A big thank you is due to all the volunteers for their smiles, energy and the use of their tools to get these stakes into the ground. This project was Year 2 of the Elizabeth Lake Ecosystem Restoration project.

Marianne Nahm

Marianne Nahm

starting the last plot

Jimsmith Lake Loop Hike November 12

Helga Knote

hikers on the top of Badger Hill

On a warm fall day in mid-November, a dozen members enjoyed a loop hike originating at Jimsmith Lake Provincial Park. The lake and area was likely named for one

Helga

admiring the view from Badger Hill

Bob Whetham

having a discussion at the top of Badger Hill

of five prospectors who travelled through the area from Walla Walla, Washington in 1865. James Smith and his gold seeking friends were headed for Fisherville where placer gold had been discovered the year before. Perhaps they

Liza Kellough
enjoying a rest and view from the 'recliners' at the top of Badger Hill

Bob Whetham
recliners arranged by energetic (and young?) hikers

Bob
coming off the top of Badger Hill heading toward Westview Overlook

Helga Knote
checking out an old prospecting excavation

Helga Knote
rest stop on Badger Hill, with Cranbrook Mountain in the background

blasted out the exploratory test hole we saw near Westview Overlook.

At the top of Badger Hill, we located various geographical features such as Baker and Cranbrook Mountain and forest service roads. As we continued along the single track trail carpeted with soft, golden larch needles; we observed lots of pink flagging, presumably marking boundaries. The speculation was that there could be an interface fire protection logging project happening this winter. It will be interesting to see the results next spring.

Helga
on the trail along the ridge

Helga
stopping to have a look around in a grassy glade

At Westview Overlook, our turnaround point, we visited and rehydrated for a few minutes before returning along the lovely, carpeted trail as well as a short distance on a quad track to our start point. Some

of the sharp eared and eyed birders identified chickadees, Red-breasted Nuthatches and a Canada Jay who seemed to be frequenting the playground area of the park. A muskrat was observed swimming parallel to the sandy beach.

Liza Kellough
view overlooking the newly renovated grass and sandy beach area below the Jimsmith Lake Provincial Park parking area

Liza
view toward Moyie from Westview Overlook

It was a fine fall afternoon to spend walking in the outdoors and visiting with friends.

Marianne Nahm

Helga Knote
heading southwest down Badger Hill

Stump and Bump Loop November 19

All 11 members arrived on time and we were able to start as planned. There was a light snowfall earlier, which made the trail well defined but obscured the icy spots. The start was slow so

Marianne Nahm

the hiking group

Judy Chapman

view towards Cranbrook from bump 4

everybody could adjust their equipment to the slippery conditions. The cloud layer kept the temperatures at a comfortable level, and the new snow made the valley and hills into a winter landscape.

It was an easy hike to Stump Lake, which is a has-been. It is just a wide open area the size of two football fields, with no water. A very beautiful and tranquil place. Marianne saw a

vole. We noticed mushrooms in trees as well as galls on alder bushes and on the ground.

Along the route we looked for berry-bearing plants and spotted: huckleberry and snowberry bushes as well as kinnikinnick, wild rose, Oregon-grape plants and red osier dogwood. Jo Ellen pointed out the differences between male and female Rocky Mountain juniper and common juniper, which were growing side by side. We also learned to count the needles on lodgepole pine (bunches of two needles) and ponderosa pine (three long needles per bunch).

Judy Chapman
Rocky Mountain juniper atop bump 4

After Stump Lake we climbed up to the bumps. It is a lovely trail through a forest of lots of ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir. The trail was reasonably steep and we all were nice and warm by the time we got to the top, where we admired the incredible views into the valley. We heard a Red-breasted Nuthatch. Along the trails we also saw: Pileated Woodpecker, Common Raven, Black-capped Chickadee, and a Brown Creeper.

This area is practically in Judy C.'s back yard, so she taught us the local numbering system for the bumps. We admired the views from bumps 1 to 5 as well as bumps 1A, 2B; there were lots of bumps.

From here it was all downhill and back to the parking lot, where we arrived around 4 p.m., after a hike of approximately 5 km.

A very enjoyable, interesting, educational and fun hike. Thank you, Gretchen, for reconnaissance and leading this hike.

Judy Brunner

Gretchen Whetham

This juniper has berries, so it's female.

Judy Chapman

view of Stump Lake down below the ridge of bump 5

Animal Tracks in the Snow

Outings in the snow provide a good opportunity to observe animal tracks. The best conditions are when there's a light snowfall on top of a well-consolidated surface.

snowshoe hare tracks

Snowshoe Hare

Snowshoe hare is mostly known for its huge hind feet that enable it to float on the surface of snow. In certain fluffy snow conditions, the hind foot of the Snowshoe Hare can resemble a much larger 4 toed, dog-like print with claws showing (due to its splayed, furred toes), and we are often fooled. But, a heavier beast would sink way down in these conditions. The print in the photo above was likely made in fresh snow when the print was compacted before the surrounding snow was blown away.

You may also notice Jackrabbit tracks. Their hind foot is not as large, but they are capable of long leaps, sometimes in a zigzag pattern, indicating their flight from danger.

deer mouse tracks

Deer Mouse

The deer mouse is very abundant, but seldom seen, because it is nocturnal. Tiny tracks, smaller than a dime, are noticeable in the

snow. Their bounding stride averages 20 cm. On a hard surface you might see the hind print falling in front of the tiny front prints, but usually the prints merge in soft snow and appear as larger pairs with a tail drag evident. Follow the tracks and they may take you down to a burrow.

red squirrel tracks

Red squirrel

Red squirrel prints will also be common. You'll often hear their chatter announcing their territory and notice middens at their favourite feeding sites: piles of cone scales and cores. They often leave little highways of tracks between trees showing groups of four prints, hind falling ahead of fore. In ideal conditions you'll be able to count four fore toes and five hind toes. In deeper snow the prints merge to form pairs of diamond-shaped tracks.

Gretchen Whetham and Daryl Calder

photographs by Gretchen

Circling Myrtle Mountain with Lyle Grisedale December 10

Nine intrepid hikers joined me for a hike in the Kimberley Nature Park on the 10th of December. Our route would take us over several of the Nature Park trails that would eventually lead us around Myrtle Mountain and back to our start at the Higgins Street entrance to the park, a distance of 11 kilometres.

Lyle Grisedale
giant ponderosa pine along the Duck Pond Trail

A few centimetres of new snow covered the icy trails and made walking the first leg of the hike quite pleasant. We stopped briefly at what is known as Myrtle Junction where 4 trails join. This is the site of the Ski Cabin that sat at the base of Myrtle Mountain during the 40s and 50s to provide the early skiers with a warming hut while skiing on the lower slopes of Myrtle Mountain. The ski hill moved to Northstar Mountain in the 60s, and that is its current location. Myrtle mountain is named after the wife of one of the early prospectors in the Kimberley area.

From here we travelled along what is known as

Lyle
view of Wycliffe

Lyle
claw marks on aspen tree

Upper Army Road. We had several kilometres of more difficult walking on frozen foot tracks under the new snow. Along the way we found a large tree with many bear claw marks going up its trunk. We also observed pine marten tracks crossing our path every 40 meters or so. New snow gives us the opportunity to see what animals are in the forest. Eventually we arrived at the junction with Jimmy Russell Road and turned onto this trail until we arrived at SW Passage Trail.

Here on the south side of Myrtle Mountain there was less snow and the walking became very easy. Along SW Passage we stopped at a lookout known as Hilde's Bench for lunch. Our first bird was observed, a Townsend Solitaire. After lunch we continued along SW Passage to Skid Road Trail which led us through a large area that is being thinned and cleaned up to help with wildfire mitigation.

Gretchen Whetham

pine marten tracks

Arriving at Duck Pond Trail we turned left and traversed below the northeast side of Myrtle Mountain, stopping briefly for a photo op at the huge Ponderosa Pine along the trail. Arriving at the Duck Pond we turned right and travelled along Keiver Way until the junction with Edge Trail which we followed back to Higgins Street, where we had started. Along Edge Trail we saw a Clark's Nutcracker atop a dead snag and heard a Common Raven, and at the park's entrance we saw a Mountain Chickadee. The hike, along with the stop for lunch, was just over 4 hours, and the weather was very pleasant. A great day for a hike with enthusiastic Naturalists.

Gretchen

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

St. Eugene steugene.ca
Bird Observations https://ebird.org
Cranbrook Community Forest https://www.cranbrookcommunityforest.com/
East Kootenay Invasive Species Council (EKISC) https://www.ekisc.com/
iNaturalist inaturalist.ca/observations

About Field Trips

Leaders:

Radios and first aid kits are available from Paula or Marianne.
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 organizing carpooling. However, feel free to organize your own carpools from the meeting area if you feel comfortable with that.

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

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 Birding	Wednesday mornings	See RMN Calendar on our website.
Christmas Bird Counts		See RMN Calendar on our website.

Club Information

Executive

President	Marianne Nahm
Vice President	Betty Baker
Past President	Helga Knote
Secretary	Theckla Sawicki
Treasurer	Judy Brunner
BC Nature Director	Stewart Wilson
Director at Large	Claude Rioux

Frank Hastings
what the kestrel (on page 1)
was looking at

Committee Coordinators and Representatives

Bats	Scott Bodaly
Bluebirds	Marianne Nahm
Bylaws and Policies	Gretchen Whetham
Christmas Bird Count	Dianne Cooper
Club Camp	Ruth Goodwin
Communications	Susan Walp
Duck Box Monitoring	Katrin Powell/Greg Ross
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 Knote
Little Big Day	Greg Ross
Membership	Hasi Oates
Newsletter	Susan Walp
Personal Information/Privacy	Jim Hurvid
Presentations	Marianne Nahm/Paula Rogers
Ram Creek Ecological Reserve	Marianne Nahm
Regional Wildlife Advisory Committee	Ian Adams
Records	Helga Knote
Rocky Mountain Trench Natural Resources Society	Jo Ellen Floer
Skookumchuck Prairie IBA	Dianne Cooper
Sustainable Cranbrook	Stewart Wilson
Turtle Monitoring	Greg Ross
Upper Columbia Basin Environmental Collaborative	Hilary Anderson
Webmasters	Dianne Cooper

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

Next meetings -

Wednesday	17	January	7:00 pm (AGM plus regular meeting)
Wednesday	20	March	7:00 pm