

The Kestrel

Quarterly Newsletter of the
Rocky Mountain Naturalists
2024 spring equinox



Stewart Wilson

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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.

Wilks Woods Hike: toasting the year 2024

January 1



Stewart Wilson

first viewpoint looking towards New Lake area

A week before 'winter' arrived in the East Kootenay, naturalists stretched their legs in the Wilks Woods. On a mild, sunny New Year's Day 2024, ten naturalists enjoyed hiking the 5 km loop. At the halfway point, we enjoyed a wiener roast, mulled wine and apple cider, along with good company, to toast the New Year.

Monday, January 1st, was the seventh occasion in recent years that we hiked this particular chunk of Dry Belt Interior Douglas-fir forest near Cranbrook. This type of Douglas-fir forest is found with ponderosa pine in the lower elevations, and with lodgepole pine, western white pine and western larch at higher levels.

Douglas-fir was first described by David Douglas, famed Scottish botanist, in 1829. Douglas, who lived



Stewart

following the faint but useful game trails

from 1798 - 1834, was a traveller and botanical collector in North America, finding his way to British Columbia in 1825. He introduced some 50 new trees and shrubs and about 100 herbaceous plants to England from North America during his short career.



Bob Whetham

top of Sunflower Hill with Beacon Hill to the south



Stewart Wilson

at the wiener roast site



Stewart Wilson

signing the log book on the summit of Whiskey Jack

The Interior and Coastal varieties of Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) have some slight differences. The Coastal Douglas-fir can grow to be the largest tree in BC and in Canada, exceeded in size only by pacific coast redwoods (*Sequoia sempervirens*) in California and Oregon [and the UK].

During our walk, evidence of historic wildfires occurring over 100 years ago could be seen. These fires had eliminated competing vegetation without killing the thick-barked mature trees.

Douglas-fir is an extremely

important wildlife tree. Woodpeckers and nuthatches frequently forage on the corky bark, which becomes increasingly thick, rough and furrowed with age, providing good habitat for insects. Some woodpeckers excavate into the inner wood. Many birds and mammals consume the tiny, plump, winged seeds.

Dead and dying Interior Douglas-firs provide



Stewart Wilson
view of Wycliffe Wildlife Corridor



Marianne Nahm
hiking down past a snag altered by
woodpeckers, on the Wilks Loop

Flammulated Owls, American Kestrels, goldeneyes, Buffleheads and mergansers. They are also used by roosting bats, and for denning by pine martens.

Witches' brooms [dense twiggy growths in trees caused by infection with fungus (especially rusts), mites, or viruses] in Douglas-firs provide sites for nesting, roosting and resting Great Horned, Great Grey and Northern Saw-whet Owls.

Daryl Calder

Early Birding

January 24

On this particular Wednesday morning, the Early Birding group, led by Daryl Calder, drove south to the fish hatchery for a look around, also looking and listening for birds on the way and on the way back. Here are some photos taken by Claude Rioux.



Belted Kingfisher



Common Redpoll (these 3 photos)

Seeds hidden in the thorny brush kept the birds coming back again and again to the shrubbery.



the pond beside the hatchery where waterfowl congregate



House Finch



female Bufflehead



Pine Grosbeaks on a spruce tree



Mallards and a male Bufflehead



Common Redpoll

Great Backyard Bird Count 2024

February 16-19

21 members participated

49 species observed (50 last year, 55 in 2022 and 53 in 2021)

1449 individual birds counted over 4 days (2474 last year, 2770 in 2022, and 4588 in 2021)

St. Eugene Misson Bird Count

February 17



Helga Knote

St. Mary River running toward Fisher Peak

Bright, sunny, clear weather, showcasing the snow-covered Rocky Mountains, was the setting for an afternoon walk at scenic St. Eugene Mission in the Aqam neighbourhood. Our group was on the lookout for bird sightings during the Great Backyard Bird Count weekend, a world-wide eBird event. The species number was low, but we did have several interesting classic sightings beside the St. Mary River. About 40 Common Goldeneye ducks were observed in two groups. They dive in multiple numbers to feed on small fish and insects such as

caddis fly larvae and water insect nymphs.

The American Dipper, also known as the Water Ouzel, is our only aquatic songbird. Two dippers were spotted along the edge of the river searching for aquatic insects and larvae. They have several adaptations to help them survive icy cold water in winter – an extra thick coat of feathers, including



Claude Rioux

looking up the St. Mary River



Claude Rioux
Eurasian Collared-Dove seen in the Pighin
farmyard



Claude
2 Eurasian Collared-Doves



Helga Knotte
the flotilla of Common Goldeneye



Claude
American Dipper

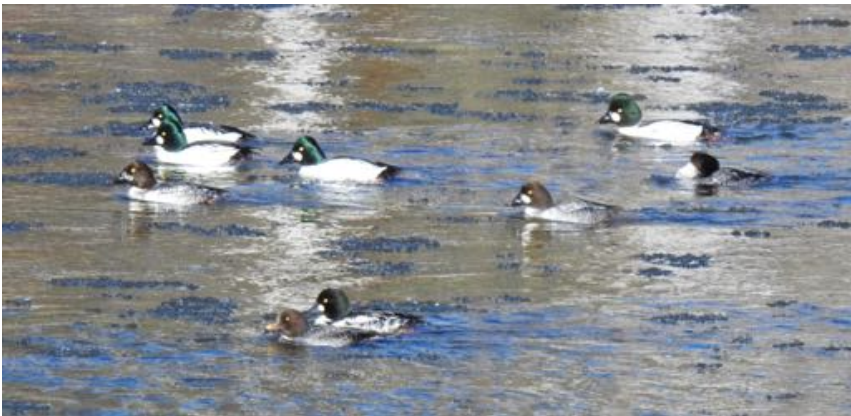


Claude
male (2) and female (1) goldeneye

along their eyelids, and a lower metabolic rate than during the summer.

St. Eugene Mission is a lovely area for birding in the golf off-season.

Marianne Nahm



Claude Rioux

goldeneyes



Helga Knot

dipper

Elsewhere in the East Kootenay

February 18

All except the shrike were near feeders. All images were captured by Helga Knote.



Wild Turkey



Northern Shrike, Elizabeth Lake

Pine Grosbeaks

Two Rocky Mountain Naturalists joined Daryl Calder for a tour of the East Kootenay South Country on February 19, the last day of the Great Backyard Bird Count. Our tour began in Cranbrook at the Tamarack Mall under overcast skies, with the morning temperature just below freezing but forecast to rise during the day.

We headed toward Gold Creek, following the Gold Creek Road to Caven Creek Road and then the Kikomun Newgate Road along the west side of Lake Koocanusa, stopping many times en route to look and listen for any sign of birds. We reached the end of the road at Newgate Sandy Shores, where we spent some time looking across the snow-covered reservoir [Lake Koocanusa is a reservoir], which is extremely low at this time of year. We noted very little avian activity along our route and agreed that it seemed eerily quiet on this mild and windless day.

On the return trip we retraced our path, making a lunch stop in the dry hills above the lake, followed by a short walk on a road that meandered through antelope brush and a small Ponderosa pine experimental plantation. From a high point we could see across Gold Bay [Gold Creek Bay on some maps]. It was from this road that we had the good luck to spot a solitary Northern Pygmy-Owl, perched in a lone trembling aspen.



Northern Pygmy-Owl in an aspen

We continued north along the Kikomun Newgate Road, then turned back onto Caven Creek Road and crossed the Kikomun Bridge. At Kikomun Creek Provincial Park we turned north on the Jaffray Baynes Lake Road, which took us into Jaffray, where we stopped again to look for birds. At the confluence of Sand Creek and Little Sand Creek we heard and then spotted a Pileated Woodpecker flying overhead, but little else.

By the end of the day, we had counted 14 species and 122 individual birds.

Thanks to Daryl for leading this outing and for his observations and comments on animal tracks, geographic information and points of interest.

Helga Knote



Gretchen Whetham

a photo of the group

Wycliffe Regional Park, part way between Kimberley and Cranbrook, is a recreational gem. Beginning this winter, the East Kootenay Regional District decided to open the park to year-round use. This 164 hectare property was one of several BC Forest Service tree nurseries which were established in the Interior. Construction workers for the nursery stayed in tents on site.

The park was established in 1950 and operated until 1967. If you look closely at some of the park



Stewart Wilson

hoodoos above Perry Creek



Stewart Wilson

Perry Creek

maintenance buildings, it is easy to see the traditional style and colours of BC Forest Service buildings from that era. Once the nursery was operational, locals, who were often housewives, were hired seasonally for weeding the seedlings. Their pre-school children would be looked after by a mother in the Wycliffe/King Street neighbourhood, for \$1.00 a day.

On Sunday, February 25, there were only older, interested adults gathered for a walk and wiener roast. A group of early arrivals walked a loop on a groomed trail enjoying views of hoodoos above the St. Mary River and the Wycliffe Buttes further to the north west. This trail brought us to Perry Creek which we ambled along, following it for several hundred metres, searching for an American Dipper. We were rewarded by one of these dark, hardy songsters diving into the cold, fast running water, searching the creek bottom for aquatic insects and larvae. After climbing out of the creek bottom, we joined the others, who had walked a different loop, for visiting and eating.

Marianne Nahm

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.

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

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.

Group sizes are limited in order to provide a quality and safe experience for everyone. Carpooling can be organized from the meeting place for those feeling comfortable. If there is space, guests are welcome to join an Outing up to twice a year. A guest must complete a waiver form and pay \$2.00 per Outing.

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.
Southwestern Alberta	Saturday 23 March 9:00	See RMN Calendar on our website.
Club Camp	Sunday 2 June to 11:00 am	Wednesday 5 June (3 nights)

Club Information

Executive

President	Marianne Nahm
Vice President	Betty Baker
Past President	Helga Knot
Secretary	Theckla Sawicki
Treasurer	Jan Gordon-Hooker
BC Nature Director	Stewart Wilson
Director at Large	Claude Rioux



Gretchen Whetham

departing the lunch site, 1 January

Committee Coordinators and Representatives

Bats	Scott Bodaly
Bluebirds	Marianne Nahm
Bylaws and Policies	Gretchen Whetham
Christmas Bird Count	Dianne Cooper
Club Camp	Jackie Leach
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 Knot
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 Knot
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	15	May	7:00 pm
Wednesday	17	July	7:00 pm
Wednesday	18	September	7:00 pm