

The Kestrel



Quarterly Newsletter of the
Rocky Mountain Naturalists

2026 Spring Equinox

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*Susan Walp led trips to Cactus Mountain
Photo: Lyle Grisedale*

Susan Walp

Longtime member of the Rocky Mountain Naturalists, is retiring from her role as editor and publisher of our quarterly newsletter, *The Kestrel*. Susan volunteered to take on this position in our club twelve years ago, in 2014. She has been a gentle taskmaster, giving us thoughtful suggestions to ensure that the articles we wrote were clear, with correct grammar and spelling, as well as providing accurate information. She appreciated good copy and good quality photographs to accompany the articles.

Susan's background is in botany. She lived in Labrador, doing field work, before the siren call of the mountains brought her to Cranbrook. Over the years she has been a valuable resource to club members, especially on our botanizing outings. She has a great memory for locations of particular plants.

Her knowledge of plants and the scientific names of plants and animals has been generously shared with her Naturalist friends. She led many interesting hikes into our local hills, sharing her knowledge of the plants and creatures we found along the way.

The Rocky Mountain Naturalists would like to thank Susan for all she has contributed to our club, and especially the many long hours she put into every edition of *The Kestrel*.

*Submitted by
Helga Knotte*

**Susan, we wish
you all the best
in whatever new
pursuits are yet
to come!**

www.rockymountainnaturalists.org

Kimberley Christmas Bird Count

Submitted by Marianne Nahm

On January 3rd we held the Kimberley Christmas Bird Count. In total, 22 counters comprising 5 teams spread out across the Kimberley count circle for the day, and teams were also supported by 3 feeder counters. The count circle includes the areas of TaTa Creek / Wasa, Meadowbrook and Lost Dog, Kimberley and Marysville, and Wycliffe. The day's temperatures ranged from a balmy -2°C to +2°C, and no one was spared the on-and-off rain, which can add to the challenge of finding and viewing birds.



Along the Kootenay River Photo: Stewart Wilson

The bird counts are tallied online in real time using the eBird app. <https://ebird.org/home>
As trip reports were submitted, our data collector Dianne was able to follow the numbers and locations and watch the day unfold. After her tally of the results and wizardry with numbers and comparisons of previous years, she has submitted a detailed report of the count. The results are published on our website at rockymountainnaturalists.org under the title 'Christmas Bird Counts'.



Varied Thrush
Photo: Theckla Sawicki



A warm-up and recap at Marysville Pub was in order!

Photo: Stewart Wilson

The birders recorded 51 species, significantly higher than the average of 43 species for the Kimberley count. New maximum numbers were recorded for a number of species. Of note was the high number of robins, which are still feeding on the fruit trees in yards around the city.

As most of us were a wee bit wet after the day, we gathered later at the Marysville Pub for some grub, bevies, and a recap of the day before heading home to warm up.

Submitted by Carol Fairhurst

Cranbrook South/Gold Creek Christmas Bird Count



Joseph Creek
Photo: Stewart Wilson



Mallards in Kinsmen Park
Photo: Stewart Wilson

New Year's Hike: Whisky Jack Hill

Once again to kick off the New Year, a hike was led and hosted by Daryl and Marianne up to Whisky Jack Hill. Eleven participants partook, with about 10cm of ground-level snow and -7°C temperature. Beautiful scenery was noted as hoar frost covered the mosses, branches, and needles. At mid-hike a wiener roast, complemented with hot beverages and homemade cookies was enjoyed by all. Crossbills, waxwings, nuthatch, ravens, chickadees, blue jays, siskin, and junco were noted. Numerous elk beds, and deer, coyote, and squirrel tracks were discovered. The final leg of the hike was an ascent to the cairn then a return to the trailhead.



Submitted by Jim Hurvid

Annual General Meeting



For the past two years, we have held our Annual General Meeting and January Bi-monthly Meeting in the old Manual Training School, which is part of the Cranbrook Public Library. Having the two meetings with a late morning start, followed by a potluck lunch, has ensured a strong turnout and sense of camaraderie.

I encourage you to read the Annual Reports that were attached to the AGM meeting notice sent out January 8. This is a summary of our many projects and events. We are a strong club with keen, dedicated members.

Article and photos by Marianne Nahm



Linda sharing ideas of upcoming 40th Anniversary

'Know nature and keep it worth knowing'



Members enjoying conversations



The Early Morning Birders (EMB) Ladies visiting



January 31

Due to a strong response to this outing, two trips were offered. Our Saturday group, of 12, enjoyed warm temperatures as we made our way along a fisherman's trail on the high bank above the Kootenay River. Beavers (*Castor canadensis*) have been industriously felling cottonwood trees. Cottonwoods are relatively short-lived trees with a lifespan of 70 to 100 years if not found by a beaver. They are a shallowly rooted, water-loving tree with deeply furrowed bark, important to bank stabilization. The young shoots and leaves are food sources for ungulates and beavers. Their branches and leaves provide excellent habitat for insects and birds. The soft wood of cottonwoods encourages woodpeckers to excavate cavities for nesting which, after use, often become nesting sites for other birds. Some other shrubs and trees that we found in this riparian area were red osier dogwood, spruce, water and paper birch.



Saturday's group learning about Wildhorse Creek Bull Trout spawning. Photo: Marianne Nahm

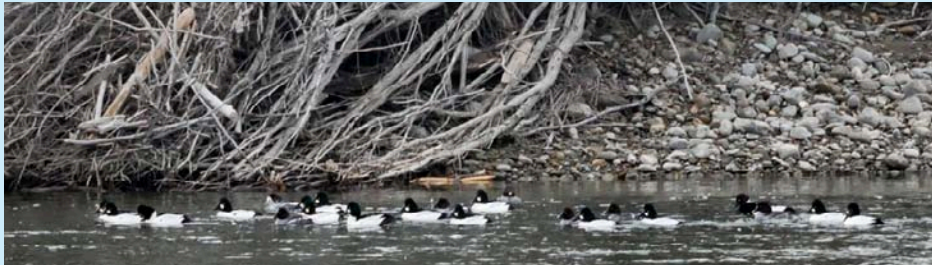


Photo: Sandy Oates

A large raft of Common Goldeneye ducks (104) generated excitement and curiosity as they dove and popped back to the surface in their search for aquatic invertebrates. Nine Bald Eagles with a mix of mature and juveniles were observed both on the river's edge and in flight.

Sunday, February 1

An 'overflow' group, of 11, repeated the Fort Steele-Kootenay River walk with Marianne on Sunday February 1st. Our walk began just south of the Fort Steele bridge. From there we noted a large beaver lodge on the bridge's east bank piling. Along the fishermen's trail we saw a number of mature cottonwood trees felled by beavers. The gnawed off stumps displayed tell-tale beaver tooth marks from the prior year, and each had new shoots growing in a ring upwards providing browse for deer and elk. On one of the beaver-felled cottonwood logs we saw signs of Pileated Woodpecker activity, with large holes drilled and fresh chips left behind in the quest for a feast of wood boring beetles. More felled trunks and still barely standing trees on the riverside trail also function as decay columns. We noted a large number of different types of conk-producing polypore (bracket or shelf) fungi.

Both banks of the Kootenay River had winter bushes with tangled masses of dead vines, topped with feathery-tailed mop headed seed bunches. We learned these vines (*Clematis ligusticifolia*) are indeed a wild native plant to this area. They will produce small, delicate white blooms in mid-summer. A good reason to mark our calendars for a return walk!



Sunday's group learning about Wildhorse Creek channelization to enhance fish survival.

Photo: Marianne Nahm



Evidence of Pileated Woodpecker at work. Photo: Paula Rogers

Walks Along Kootenay River

Cont'd

The fauna highlight of the trip was a pair of love-bird eagles who were nestled side by side and grooming themselves on a snag. Their nest was visible nearby. They didn't seem bothered in the least by our group. It was fascinating to observe them at such close range and be able to clearly see the size difference in a mated pair (female 30% larger than the male).

The other heartwarming encounter on Sunday's walk was a large river otter that swam upstream along the east bank and in front of us. It put on a fine display with repeated diving and swimming along the surface. Through binoculars we were able to get an excellent view of its head, face and ears along with its sleek up-arching back as it dove. As our new friend made each dive, it slipped under the water with an agile flip of its 18-inch-long tail.

Submitted by Aileen Collings



River Otter Photo: Sandy Oates



Wildhorse Creek with Fisher Peak - Photo: Paula Rogers



Photo: Sandy Oates

Reg Davis, one of our members who is an avid fisher and member of a couple of local fishing clubs, joined us both days to share his detailed knowledge of the local fishery. Here is his report:

The original intent was to add a presentation focussing on the Wildhorse fish passage project for bull trout. We were able to see the work done at the outlet of channel 2, but the upstream worksite was unsafe to access, and was largely hidden due to ice buildup. It was noticed that the stream flow was significantly increased on the second day, likely due to the warm overnight temperatures.

While not the focus, both groups ended up in wide-ranging discussions of fisheries management, and fish species and biology. We touched on native versus introduced species, spawning behaviour, groundwater and surface flows, and hatchery activities at the nearby Bull River Hatchery, as well as vehicle access and stream crossings.

There was some interest in FishBytes, a free, locally produced newsletter (or "fanzine") about fish, fish habitat, fish management and fishing. If any RMN members want to receive copies they should send an email with a request to get on the emailing list, to fish5bytes@gmail.com

Submitted by Reg Davis

Great Backyard Bird Count - St. Eugene Mission



Photo: Stewart Wilson

Lourdes, Helga, Pamella and Marianne during the GBBC at St. Eugene Mission.

Friday February 13th

Four of us, Helga, Lourdes, Pamella and I joined Marianne at St. Eugene Mission to kick off the Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC). It was overcast but mild (+5°C) with no snow on the ground, which made for a pleasant afternoon's birding.

At our first stop, the front yard of Pighin Farm across the road from the Mission, we observed House Finches, Pine Siskins, American Goldfinches and two Eurasian Collared-Doves busy feeding at feeders, as Common Ravens flew over. Two miniature donkeys came over to investigate us. One of them, a pregnant female, entertained us with her energetic antics.

From Prairie Bridge we walked along the St. Mary River into St. Eugene Golf Course, during which time we saw Mallards, Common Goldeneyes, and American Dippers on the river, as well as more than one hundred fifty Canada Geese on the fairways. Northern Flickers, a pair of Black-billed Magpies, a Black-capped Chickadee, Red-breasted Nuthatches, House Finches, American Goldfinches, a Song Sparrow, Red Crossbills and an American Crow were added to our list. One of the highlights of our afternoon of birding was watching a pair of mature Bald Eagles circling overhead.

Submitted by Stewart Wilson

Great Backyard Bird Count



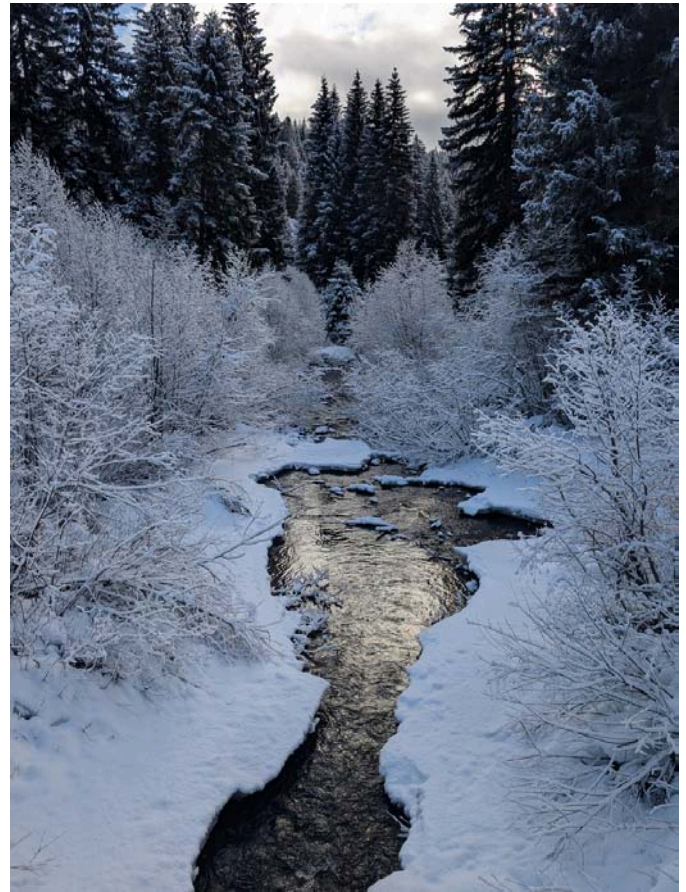
Saturday February 14 th, 2026

To celebrate GBBC, six brave (and mildly caffeinated) RMNs pointed themselves south and declared, “To Newgate!”

They cruised up Gold Creek Road alongside Philips Reservoir, hopping out to crunch across quiet, feathery snow, enjoying the perfect wintery landscape and breathing in the crisp winter air. They then crossed the “High Mountain Pass” (elevation subject to exaggeration), only to descend into the Gold-Kikomun area where the snow was once again very much gone. From scenic lake viewpoints, they scanned the icy bays, carefully peering into patches of open water. Waterfowl bobbed about, and a river otter even made a surprise appearance.

Upon reaching Newgate, they were welcomed to the Ambrose property, where they tackled a magnificent smorgasbord luncheon. Fueled by good food and company, Ian Adams shared his great knowledge about the on-site MOTUS station and how tiny transmitters track the epic migrations of many bird species.

With bellies full, they carried on—up and down a ridge and along the old road overlooking what was once the International Newgate border. Below lay sweeping sand dunes and wide sandy beaches - a perfect location for the Sandy Shores Resort.



Photos: Lourdes Niehaus

On the return journey, they squeezed in one last hike, climbing from a quiet wetland meadow through grassy brushland to a gorgeous lookout over Gold Bay. Eventually it was time to head home... but three keeners refused to admit the day was over.

They detoured to a productive pond in Jaffray, where a lone, slightly dramatic Killdeer greeted them with what can probably be described as existential contemplation.

It was an excellent day: solitaires, Bald and Golden Eagles, countless crossbills, and many a mallard—23 species and 322 individuals in total.

Submitted by Lourdes Niehaus

RAMPARTS SNOWSHOE HIKE



Photo: Rocke Robertson

Rampart Snowshoe Hike - February 22nd, 2026

Gretchen Whetham led a group of seven naturalists on a snowshoe hike to see the rock ovens built over 125 years ago by workers building the railway. The hike started just across from Coopman Road, that accesses Cranbrook's Spray Irrigation Fields, off Highway 3. A road has been built there, but we proceeded by snowshoeing through the forest for a total round trip of 4.24 km. The trail led through open forest with about 100 metres of elevation to a rock oven (now snow covered, but moss covered in warmer seasons) and to another stone oven-like structure most likely used for food storage.

On the way, keen birders in the group identified a number of our winged friends, including several Red Crossbills, Dark-eyed Juncos, Pine Siskins, a Bald Eagle and a Black-backed Woodpecker. We also had a moment to climb to a viewpoint enjoying the sunny mountain views.

We had some sun and some clouds, but that did not change the satisfaction of a great afternoon walk!

Submitted by Rocke Robertson



Photo: Gretchen Whetham

The origin of these stone ovens is somewhat unclear. They have been described as being built by Chinese laborers. However, more recent research attributes them to Italians and even Greek workers building the railroads. They are quite common throughout the East and West Kootenay on old rail beds, and also in the U.S.

A fire would be lit inside, with smoke escaping from a hole in the top. The embers would be raked out, the hole plugged and then bread and stews placed inside for baking and cooking.

OUTING to TABLETOP



Photo: Lyle Grisedale

The weather was perfect for our afternoon March 2nd outing. Gretchen led the group on this excursion. The destination was "Tabletop," which is the name of a flat-topped bump in the Ramparts area on the outskirts of Cranbrook. The one-way distance is about 1.5 km and involves a roughly 50 m ascent. With the warm weather, a large portion of the snow had melted, so everyone just needed poles instead of their snowshoes. There was enough traction to avoid slipping.

On our way to Tabletop, we saw a few Red Crossbills and Pine Siskins. However, most of our recordings involved listening, as some birds, such as a Varied Thrush, Townsend's Solitaire, Red-breasted Nuthatch, and a Mountain Chickadee, we only heard. We did catch a glimpse of two Common Ravens, and far into the distance in the treetops, we briefly saw a Bald Eagle.



We made it to the top of Tabletop and were greeted with a pleasant view and, in the distance, a large herd of elk. Again, we couldn't have asked for better weather.

It was 3:22 p.m. when we returned and had covered 1.86 km, recording 8 species and 33 individuals in total. It felt like a sign of spring!

*Photo:
Gretchen Whetham*



*Group at Trailhead
Photo: Helga Knot*



*Lyle photographing bitterroot rosette. (Lewisia rediviva)
Photos: Helga Knot*



*Tabletop Group
Photo: Lyle Grisedale*



RMNs heading downhill from Tabletop. Photo: Helga Knot

Wycliffe Park Social - March 7



About 30 club members joined together for a social event on March 7 at Wycliffe Regional Park. There's nothing like a campfire to promote the warmth of friendship, good conversation, and shared interests. Several methods of roasting hot dogs and smokies were demonstrated! Thanks, everyone, for coming.

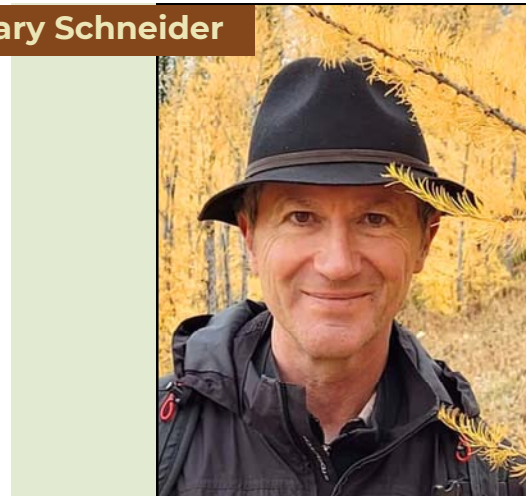
Submitted by Elizabeth (Betty) Baker

Introducing our new Editor and Designer - Gary Schneider

While not *exactly* an Editor, but more of a Designer with editing expertise, I graduated from Douglas College's Graphic Design and Communication program way back in 1980! (Yes, that was in the pre-computer era.) Since those early days, I have performed many aspects of design, including illustration, print publishing, signage and displays, logo design, copywriting, and photography.

Before moving to Kimberley in September 2020, I spent nearly 20 years at PFW Publishing in Kaslo, located in the West Kootenay, where I created display advertising and designed visitor guides for the region.

I relocated to Kimberley to be with my fiancée, Kevi, and it has turned out to be a fantastic place to call home! I am an avid nature enthusiast, and when I'm not cross-country skiing, hiking, kayaking or mountain biking I devote my time to my other passions which include music and theatre.



This is my debut issue of *The Kestrel*, and thanks to everyone who sent in articles and photos. I preemptively offer my apologies for any misplaced or missing credits, or photos that did not make it into the newsletter.

I'm doing my best to fit everything in while still getting my bearings in this vibrant community. Since I'm not fully retired just yet, I'll dedicate as much of my time as I can to *The Kestrel!*

Submission GUIDELINES



Photo: Gary Schneider

What format should I use to submit my article?

Since I will be reformatting all submissions, the easiest method is to paste your text directly into an email. I can also accept articles in Word, .txt, or .rtf formats.

What format should I use to submit my photos?

I prefer photos in .jpg format, and they should ideally be between 2-4 MB. I will resize them to reduce the overall file size for the publication. To make it easier for me, please rename your photos. Instead of a generic label like 'XYZ123.jpg', use something descriptive like 'Tabletop Mtn. Hike - Bob Smith'. This will assist me in locating the correct images, labeling them properly, and crediting the photographer accurately.

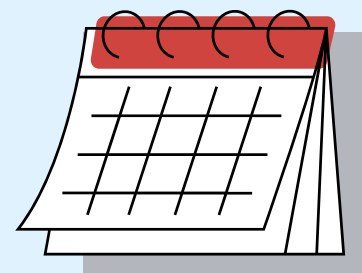
When emailing *The Kestrel* at rmnkestrel@gmail.com...

Just as with naming your photos, it would be greatly appreciated if you could specify your content in the 'subject' line. Instead of a vague title like '6 more pictures', please write something like 'Tabletop Mtn pics - Photographer's Name'. This helps me quickly access and accurately place and credit your submissions in the publication.

What is the deadline?

The official deadline is five days before the publication date, which coincides with the solstice or equinox. I encourage early submissions while the memories are fresh, and it helps me manage the layout of the upcoming issue effectively.

If you have any other questions or comments, please email me, Gary, at rmnkestrel@gmail.com



Internet Links

The website for Rocky Mountain Naturalists can be found at: 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 one of these sites now and then to see how the science has given us new information. gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/plants-animals-ecosystems/wildlife/human-wildlife-conflict/staying-safe-around-wildlife or wildsafebc.com

Elizabeth Lake Turtle Beds
[instagram.com/p/DN5zFvjYhX/](https://www.instagram.com/p/DN5zFvjYhX/)

Bird Observations ebird.org

BC Bluebird Society bcbluebirds.org

East Kootenay Invasive Species Council (EKISC) ekisc.com

iNaturalist inaturalist.ca/observations

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
Cranbrook Kimberley
Wednesday mornings

See RMN Calendar on our website.

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 (or several contributors) to write an account of the field trip for the newsletter. Send it in to rmnkestrel@gmail.com, along with (captioned) 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 a field trip up to twice a year. A guest must complete a waiver form and pay \$2.00 per field trip.

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



Executive



President	Betty Baker
Vice President	Linda Digby
Past President	Marianne Nahm
Secretary	Theckla Sawicki
Treasurer	Jan Gordon-Hooker
BC Nature Director	Stewart Wilson
Director at Large	Lourdes Niehaus

Group Representatives and Committee Contacts

Bats
Bluebirds
BCNature
Bylaws and Policies
Cavity Nesting Group
Christmas Bird Count
Club Camp
Communications
Early Morning Birding
East Kootenay Invasive Species Council
Elizabeth Lake
Field Trips
Internal Communications
Kootenay Conservation Program
Little Big Day
Membership
Newsletter
Personal Information/Privacy
Presentations
Ram Creek Ecological Reserve
Records
Regional Wildlife Advisory Committee
Rocky Mountain Trench Natural Resources Society
Skookumchuck Prairie KBA
Turtle Monitoring
Upper Columbia Basin Environmental Collaborative
Webmasters

Scott Bodaly
Marianne Nahm
Stewart Wilson
Gretchen Whetham
Katrin Powell/Greg Ross
Dianne Cooper
Jackie Leach
Susan Walp
Daryl Calder
Frank Hastings
Stewart Wilson
Paula Rogers
Paula Rogers
Helga Knoté
Greg Ross
Hasi Oates
Gary Schneider
Jim Hurvid
Marianne Nahm/Paula Rogers
Marianne Nahm
Helga Knoté
Ian Adams
Jo Ellen Floer
Dianne Cooper
Greg Ross
Hilary Anderson
Dianne Cooper/Jackie Diveky

RMNats regular meetings - every two months,
on the third Wednesday of odd-numbered months at 7pm
Next regular meetings: Wednesday May 20 • July 15 • Sept 16 - 2026