The Kestrel

Quarterly Newsletter of the
Rocky Mountain Naturalists

2014 spring equinox

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Do you have a good kestrel picture [our local species, the American kestrel] for the first page of the newsletter? If so, please send it to
[redacted]
Susan Walp

Perry Creek outing January 19

A fine winter day encouraged 20 naturalists to visit a curious area near Cranbrook in mid-January. 'Old Town', located along Perry Creek, occupies the most westerly patch of flat ground above the St. Mary River and below 'the canyon'. In 1867, a placer gold rush led to the creation of the town. Old Town thrived for about 10 years, boasting dance halls, several saloons, hotels, 3 stores and, of course, a jail. The 'Big Wheel', which is now prominently displayed at Fort Steele, operated beside Perry Creek. Bard McGinn, who owns acreage at Old Town, generously allowed our group to tromp around the area. One of the snowshoers, Gary, remembered the site when his father operated a sawmill, planer mill and logging operations in the 1940's and 50's and was surprised at how well the trees had grown back.

photo: Greg

A short distance to the west, we entered a selectively harvested woodlot. Daryl described how to determine the age of regenerating western larches. We could see, too, how Interior Douglas-firs were increasing in diameter due to the increased sunlight, nutrient and soil moisture which resulted from the careful logging. Peter interpreted the signs of a variety of woodpeckers by observing bark flakings and cavity excavations. Evidently, 2 types of sapsuckers and at least 4 types of woodpeckers were attracted to the veteran western larches.

A historic miners' trail led us upstream beside Perry Creek. Large spruce, Douglas-fir and cottonwood trees had grown tall in the shady, moist environment following the end of the gold rush. We noticed a hand constructed ditch which traversed a steep, rocky hillside and directed water to the placer mines. The Chinese workers had some control over the ditch and could sell the water for sluicing and power generation.

Eventually, at the canyon mouth, we could not go any further upstream because the low snow pack and unstable ice layers created a hazard.

Greg

Open water, incredibly clear and pure, allowed all manner of odd ice formations to develop. Occasionally we spotted an American Dipper foraging in the cold water, or a Townsend's Solitaire up on a tree tip. Further downstream, after crossing a suspended foot bridge, we followed 'Big Wheel' road to the 'old missing bridge'. A safe snow bridge allowed the happy group to complete the loop back to the vehicles. Thanks again to Bard and Jan McGinn for allowing us to cross their property and for providing historical insight.

Daryl

Greg

Submitted by Daryl Calder

Jimsmith area January 26

Twelve of us hiked around the Jimsmith Lake area on a cloudy Sunday afternoon. Most were on snowshoes, but two had only hiking boots, and they did just fine. We went up the Ladies' Trail to the quarry and down the Chicken Trail. It was overcast and damp. Everything was covered in hoarfrost, which changed with elevation. We saw tracks of deer, hares, canids, and more [no cougar this year, though]. Some of the lichens on the trees had sporangia at this time of year. We saw areas where the forest was densely stocked and areas where it had been thinned by logging or fire, some really huge trees, larches, pines, Douglas-firs, spruces, etc. The trip was around 7.5 km.

Susan Walp

photos by Joy

Elizabeth Lake February 2

photos: Stewart

On Ground Hog Day 2014, eight RMNats wandered around Elizabeth Lake. We investigated muskrat lodges, deciphered the tracks of coyotes attempting to get at the muskrats, and identified elk, deer, mouse and vole tracks. Lynn, who has done a lot of research on the history of Elizabeth Lake, had placed jars containing historical notes in various locations out on and around the lake. She gave the geographical coordinates to those people who had GPS receivers, and we used the GPS receivers to find these geocaches. At each geocache site we read the note and learned a bit of history.

Stewart, known for his eagle eye, observed and photographed a most unusual bird while it examined a shallow patch of open water. After some consultation with our 'birder' naturalists, we determined that the mystery bird was a Virginia Rail. This bird is seldom seen in the East Kootenay because only its summer range extends this far north. According to Peter, it usually spends winters around Louisiana.

Daryl Calder, Susan Walp

Virginia Rails

photos by Greg

Virginia Rail with ice on its bill

Scotobiology

I first came across the term 'Scotobiology' in a Canadian Geographic magazine, April 2011, in an article about the establishment of a Dark Sky Preserve in Jasper National Park. (Of the thirteen Dark Sky Preserves in Canada, Jasper is the world's largest with Grassland National Park the second largest.)
A quote from the article: "According to an emerging area of science known as scotobiology (the study of biology as affected by darkness),artificial light is often the enemy of indigenous wildlife, distracting insects from pollinating and making small foraging animals more visible to predators at night."
I found the idea of a 'biology of darkness' quite intriguing and went on-line to learn more.
The term 'scotobiology' comes from the Greek word 'scotos' which means 'dark'.
It came out of an International Symposium entitled "Ecology of the Night": Darkness as a Biological Imperative, held at Muskoka, Canada in September, 2003.
This is a clearly defined new field of science that covers all biological systems that operate in the night and require the absence of light to function normally. This includes animals, birds, insects, plants and even human health (the correct functioning of the immune system, disease, cancer, sleep disorders, etc). There are also sociological, anthropological and cultural aspects of light pollution.
For more information see the accompanying links.
Audrey Hoeg

http://www.starlight-theatre.ca/images/SCOTOBIOLOGY-BIDWELL.PDF

http://www.starlight2007.net/pdf/proceedings/Scotobiology_layout.pdf

Read about scotobiology and then try to answer this question: Would those Virginia Rails have migrated south on time if there had been no bright lights around Elizabeth lake? What about the Red-necked grebe [see Greg's January 25 post on the Rocky Mountain Naturalistts Facebook page]?

Wilks-Kahn February 16

Some fresh snow gave a good surface for our outing. Sixteen people started on snowshoes at about 1010 meters at the end of Wilks Road and climbed to 1198 meters (after 2.6 k and 2 hours). Total climb was 188 meters. The descent took about 45 minutes.

Common Raven 5
Black-capped Chickadee 2
Golden-crowned Kinglet 1
Townsend's Solitaire 1

Greg Ross

Afterwards, we held the Rocky Mountain Naturalists winter dinner at Marco Polo.

Skiing with Dogs

On Feb 22, 2014, a group of intrepid RM Naturalists skied a 6 km loop at 10 km on Gold Creek Road, south of Cranbrook's reservoir. Paula, George, Peter, Greg, Frank, Chase, Sammy and Roscoe attended.

Peter had reported that on Wednesday he and Jack had broken trail through a couple of feet of powder snow, so we were expecting heavy slogging. We were delighted to discover a nice, new snowmobile track, probably laid down by the dogsledders who also use this loop.

Greg's dog, Chase, loved the sled track. [We did too!]

This snowshoe rabbit didn't need a packed trail.

At 3 km, we reached the top of the hill, 25m above our start, and started sliding back to the vehicles.

It was a gentle slide. In a month, icy conditions will make the hairpin corner more challenging.

Peach pie time, YES!!!!

Frank Hastings

Salesbury Creek Snowshoe Hike

"It was bitingly cold with a constant blizzard of snow falling down upon us, but a die-hard group of nine RM Nats bravely faced the elements to snowshoe the Salesbury Creek Trail on Sunday 2 March. With our informative leader, Daryl Calder, plowing through the deep snow, the RM

bear claw marks on aspen trunk

Nats were rewarded with beautiful views of a winter wonderland. Not only was an abundance of different animal tracks seen, including moose, deer, fox or wolf, squirrel, and mouse (although mice would be better terminology, as there is never just one mouse), but a real live snowshoe hare was spotted hiding under a pine tree. Once we came too close for comfort to the hare, it bounded away deeper into the dense forest. Along our

photos: Helga

journey, Daryl also pointed out the many different trees and small ecosystems we travelled through. Between Daryl and George breaking trail, we covered approximately 6.5 kms. Although it was a very interesting snowshoe with lots learned, we were definitely glad to return to our nice warm vehicles."

Paula Rogers

upcoming events

Mark your Calendars and celebrate International Migratory Bird Day

2014 Wings Over The Rockies 18th Annual Festival
www.wingsovertherockies.org
The Mystery of Migration

The Festival will provide the opportunity for visitors and locals alike to learn more about the mystery of migration and about the Columbia Valley, 'our backyard- the envy of the world'.
Coinciding with International Migratory Bird Day, May 10th, the festival offers a full week of more than 70 field trips, presentations and workshops.
Registration opens April 7th. Many events fill within minutes. The early bird gets the worm!

2014 Creston Valley Bird Fest, 2nd Annual
www.crestonvalleybirds.ca

May 9-11 2014
Presentations, Field Trips, Tours, Valley Events and of course, more Food, Wine, Cheese and Juice, all from the Creston Valley!
Registration now open.

internet links

https://www.facebook.com/groups/RockyMtnNats/

http://www.starlight-theatre.ca/images/SCOTOBIOLOGY-BIDWELL.PDF
http://www.starlight2007.net/pdf/proceedings/Scotobiology_layout.pdf

club information

executive

president	Peter Davidson
vice president	Tara Szkorupa
secretary	Marianne Nahm
treasurer	Lois Gruenig
BC nature director	Greg Ross
outings	George and Paula Rogers
presentations	Marianne Nahm

other committee and club representatives

Little Big Day	Greg Ross
Christmas bird counts	Greg Ross
Elizabeth Lake	Tara Szkorupa
newsletter	Susan Walp

outings

leader responsibilities:

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 outing.

carpoolers: Please offer to chip in for gas.

no dogs on outings, please, unless otherwise specified

You may send a picture of your dog to susanwalp@gmail.com.

upcoming outings

Saturday 22 March - Ann Redfern Memorial Walk - Meet at Wasa Campground entrance 10:00 am. Cranbrook people 9:30 am Tamarack Mall parking area directly west of Husky for carpooling Bring a lunch. Ruth 2[illegible]

Tuesday mornings starting 8 April - early morning birding at Elizabeth Lake - 7:30

Sunday 27 April - Dutch Creek Hoodoos - 12 noon - led by Daryl

Sunday 1 June 2 pm - community forest [illegible]

Susan Walp

meetings

held every two months, in odd-numbered months

upcoming meetings

Wednesday 21May 7:00 pm