

# **Rocky Mountain Naturalists Annual Committee Reports** **2025**

## **Bat Committee 2024**

**Respectfully submitted by: Scott Bodaly**



Hello from the bat committee

2024 for Kootenay bats was a good year. Monitoring for White Nose Syndrome (WNS) is ongoing. If anyone encounters a dead bat, please don't touch it without some form of protection (a small chance of carrying rabies), but if possible double bag it and put it in your freezer. Contact me and I will get it to Bats BC to determine cause of death which may be WNS and an indication that WNS has made its way into B.C.

Twelve trees have been modified in the Wycliffe area between Kimberley and Cranbrook for habitat enhancement. These trees had screens mounted on the lower trunks for capturing guano from the bats using the roosts. Samples have been collected and sent for analysis (no results yet). The results will include information regarding which species are using the trees and the presence of any pathogens including WNS.

I have completed training to be a bat ambassador. Wonderful course provided by a group of passionate professionals.

## **Rocky Mountain Naturalists**

### **Club Camp 2024**

**Respectfully submitted by: Jackie Leach**

Our Club Camp this year was held for 3 nights the first week in June in Fernie. There were 30 people present. The majority camped at Mount Fernie Provincial Park, some stayed in accommodation nearby and a few came for day trips.

There wasn't the best weather, there was a lot of rain. We were able to do most of our planned hikes but it was too wet to cycle. Our potluck and wiener roast were fairly dry, and one night most of the folks went out to eat.

We went to the Anglican Church where our guest speaker - Terry Nelson - gave a slide presentation with great pictures of the area. Terry has published two books;

- A Hiking Guide of Fernie
- BigTrees.

The presentation covered most of the Kootenays. The next day Terry led a hike from the road just past the campground and he led us to a big Cedar and gave us information on the local vegetation.

Of course the sun came out on Wednesday just as we were packing up to head home, though some folks did get a dry hike in. All in all it was a good experience and a chance to get to know members better.

Our three organizers are already working on our next spring Club Camp in Creston. They are Paula Rogers, Betty Baker and Jackie Leach

## **East Kootenay Invasive Species Council 2024** **Respectfully submitted by: Fred Hastings – RMNats Rep**

EKISC mainly manages weeds on public lands.

The major EKISC concern in 2024 was the spreading of invasive plants and insects.

Leafy Spurge contains toxic sap that can irritate skin and cause blisters on humans and animals. Report this invader and its location to EKISC or the RDEK.

Cheat Grass can fuel forest fires when it spreads along forest trails by attaching to clothing and animals. Bring a garbage bag on hikes, so you can hand pull, bag and dispose of Cheat Grass in your garbage can.

Watch for English Ivy in town and on walking trails. It is spreading from SW B.C. Pull and garbage this climbing and ground covering invader.

***Make your own Christmas Wreaths. Don't buy them from stores, because their wreaths often come from elsewhere and their branches can contain eggs of invasive insects.***

### **Report on EKISC (East Kootenay Invasive Species Council AGM 2024)**

Respectfully Submitted by Daryl Calder

All invasive species (whether land or water based) can have significant impacts to environmental, social and economic values of our region. In fact, after habitat loss, invasive species are considered to be the second greatest threat to global biological diversity.

June 20th, 2024 was the day of the EKISC AGM, well known to be an interesting and fun field trip to several East Kootenay locations. About 30 of us, including several naturalists, hopped on the bus. Perhaps the most relevant location to naturalists is the Nupqu Native Plant Nursery at Cherry Creek. We received a warm, meaningful welcome from the highly experienced and dedicated management team.

A detailed introduction to the acquisition, propagation and production of native plants was followed by a guided tour of the large nursery. Primarily wholesale, supplying appropriate plants to satisfy the mining industries' reclamation commitments, grasses, shrubs and trees are grown in large quantities.

Later, at the Old Kimberley Airport site, several local 'prescribed burning' experts outlined the many facets of the process which precedes a successful burn.

Finally, at Wasa Lake North Beach, it was time for a multi course lunch, guest speakers and the AGM.

The EKISC is very proficient at welcoming everyone to learn about the wide array of projects and initiatives being undertaken in order to defend the East Kootenay.

**Bluebird Trail Report for 2024**  
**Respectfully submitted by: Marianne Nahm**

The Rocky Mountain Naturalists Club nest box routes totaled 29 trails with all trails submitting data. A keen group of Columbia Valley monitors, who were lead and mentored by Claude Rioux the past two years, added several new trails to this area. This provided increased nesting opportunities for Bluebirds and Swallows in the Fairmont area. A new short route off Pighin Road in the Wycliffe area between Cranbrook and Kimberley was monitored by Ruth, a young ten-year-old and her Grandma Cheryl.

87% of our 423 boxes were occupied.

Mountain Bluebirds tend to be our earliest nesters with 480 eggs laid, 396 hatched and 326 chicks fledged. This is an 82% success rate of hatchlings to fledged chicks which is 9% less than 2023.

Western Bluebirds laid 865 eggs, 702 hatched and 621 chicks fledged. This is an 88% success rate of hatchlings to chicks fledged which is 4% less than 2023.

Tree Swallows laid 918 eggs with 802 hatched and 624 chicks fledged. This is a 78% success rate of hatchlings to fledged chicks which is 2% higher than 2023.

Several other species used the nest boxes including Violet-green Swallows, Black-capped and Mountain Chickadees. There was only one House Wren recorded. All of these species had a 100% success rate. A big thank you to Jim Thormahlen, our nest box carpenter, for keeping us

in a supply of boxes. A big thank you to the 40 monitors who spend hours in the field recording their observations from May through early August.

## **Early Morning Birding – Wednesday Mornings 2024**

**Respectfully submitted by: Daryl Calder**

Early Birding, on Wednesdays, continues to be a regular opportunity for naturalists to advance local knowledge of East Kootenay bird populations and their distribution. The 3 or 4 hour adventure each week is a great way for naturalists to explore various scenic landscapes near Cranbrook and Kimberley as the seasons change.

While the primary objective of Early Birding is the spotting, identification and listing of as many species as possible, conversations regarding such topics as native grasses, shrubs and trees, soils, clouds, insects and habitats are inevitable.

As Christmas and the winter solstice approach, destinations within the various Christmas Bird Count circles are chosen. Thus, we can become familiar with winter species and their whereabouts.

In 2024, naturalists took advantage of over 40 opportunities to search for and record many of the bird species which occur in the southern Rocky Mountain Trench region.

Approximately 190 species were observed and recorded on eBird again this year, from Accipiters and Blackbirds to Vireos and Yellowthroats. One never knows what will appear next. Owls perhaps.

The core group of regular participants, a dozen naturalists, made significant strides in their skills and confidence with respect to recognition of specific habitats, efficient use of binoculars, scopes and cameras, listening and using smartphone apps to help solidify accurate ID's. As a result, on any naturalist outing, someone now has the confidence and skills to draw attention to a particular bird and record it on eBird.

On Sunday evenings, or Monday mornings, a message is issued to over 40 naturalists, indicating the starting time and place of the next week's outing. Expectations for weather conditions and footwear, along with photos and notes from the previous week are provided. A few notes about a bird or a situation provide food for thought, elevating the level of curiosity.

## **Ram Creek Ecological Reserve Warden Annual Report – December, 2024**

**Respectfully submitted by: Marianne Nahm**

Ram Creek Warm Springs – ER #28  
Warden: Rocky Mountain Naturalists Club  
Volunteer Hours – 45 hours  
Submitted by Marianne Nahm on behalf of RMNats Club

Visit # 1 May 19, 2024

Three naturalists walked into the Ram Creek pools via Ram Creek FSR on the Sunday of the long weekend in May. Air temperature at the parking lot was +1 degree. The seasonal side creek draining from the north into Ram Creek, near the old logging landing, was challenging to cross due to considerable flow. Once at the pools, we found very little litter and no campfire evidence. We dug out a number of thistle and oxeye daisy rosettes, staying clear of the poison ivy that was showing good growth. Poison ivy plants are prolific on the western edge of the pools. We walked to the entrance of the ER which is accessed from the Top of the World Provincial Park side. Again, there was very little litter or human disturbance along the trail.

Visit #2 September 29, 2024

Six naturalists accessed the springs via Ram Creek FSR. There were no vehicles in the parking area and negligible litter. There had been some rain the previous several weeks so a number of different fungi were observed. I took some photos and hope to get those into the inaturalist Ram Creek project this winter. One of our guest participants was an herbalist so shared her knowledge of the medicinal uses of some of the plants and fungi.

Upon reaching the pools, which had three bathers and a dog who had accessed the ER from the east entrance. We clipped seed heads of several thistle species. Temperature of the three bathing pools was measured with the large upper pool being the warmest at 95°F, large lower pool at 92°F and the small middle pool at 92°F.

We quickly trekked out the 700 metres to the east entrance and back. While eating our lunch below the pools, three hikers arrived from the east looking for the trail to Shark Tooth Mountain Mt. via Marmalade Basin having followed Google Maps. They were kilometres from their destination so we convinced them to return to their vehicle the way they came in. We then headed back to our vehicles experiencing some rain so did not stop to check on knapweed growth at the old logging landing.



View of pools looking south. Photo by Liza Kellough



Signage at start of trail. Photo Marianne Nahm

# **Upper Columbia Basin Environmental Collaborative (UCBEC) report 2024**

**Respectfully submitted by: Hilary Anderson**

The Upper Columbia Basin Environmental Collaborative (UCBEC) is an alliance of provincial, regional and local organizations with environmental interests in the Columbia Basin that is working to improve environmental outcomes associated with the Columbia River Treaty.

The Columbia River Treaty was established in 1964 to reduce serious flooding events in the Columbia Basin and provide hydroelectric power to a growing population. It led to the construction of multiple dams and reservoirs that flooded 270,000 acres of ecosystems in B.C., displacing First Nations, communities and infrastructure, and impacting farms, tourism and forestry activities. The treaty has now reached the end of its 60-year minimum term and is being renegotiated. In July, Canada's negotiating team reached an Agreement-in-Principle (AIP) with the U.S. and is now working to conclude a modernized treaty.

This year the UCBEC team focussed on communicating with government negotiators to assist with finalizing provisions to incorporate ecosystem enhancement in the treaty. After the AIP was announced, UCBEC responded with a detailed feedback document of pros and cons. Two team members also participated in a conference in Spokane, Washington and were able to discuss and present this document directly to members of the Canadian and US negotiating teams. The document and a summary, as well as much background information, may be read here: <https://www.kootenayresilience.org/columbia-river-treaty>.

A key take-away from the AIP is the reduction of pre-planned storage of water for flood risk management from 8.95 to 3.6 million-acre-feet in the Arrow Lakes. This change gives BC dam operators flexibility to reduce dramatic water fluctuations that harm the environment and to achieve levels that promote habitat restoration. Next steps for UCBEC include helping inform how the increased flexibility might be best used for positive environmental outcomes.

The Province of BC is also seeking your input as Columbia Basin residents. The provincial website ( <https://engage.gov.bc.ca/columbiarivertreaty/agreement-in-principle/> ) provides an opportunity to complete an online survey, selecting those sections you want to provide feedback on, or to provide a written submission. Feedback received so far has helped draft amended Treaty text but will also be important for ongoing implementation of the treaty in BC. UCBEC hopes you will join them in continuing to advocate strongly for positive environmental change in the Columbia Basin.



# **RMNats 2024 Fall Turtle report**

**Respectfully submitted by: Greg Ross and Katrin Powell**

## Date 2024 spring monitoring began:

April 18, 2024 – Started monitoring turtle beds and did fence repair.  
There was no predation.

April 18, 2024 - Found 3 Fall emergent and 21 Spring emergent holes.  
We started opening nests on April 22nd and continued finding more  
Spring emergent holes until nest opening was completed on May 3.

## Date 2024 spring monitoring ended (digging out and looking for new nests):

- July 12, 2024 is the last date we found a nest. We continued to look for new nests for another week, and then continued going every few days until August 8 doing predator and fence checks as well as weed management.

## Prepared and weeded the beds 2024 in preparation for new nests:

From April 18 to May 28, 2024 (this includes early spring fence repair)

## # of visits throughout 2024:

- We made 53 visits to the turtle beds, including dates covered by relief workers.

## Date of first turtle nest laid, 2024:

- June 2 was the first turtle nest laid

## Date of last turtle nest laid, 2024:

- We found the last turtle nest on July 12

## Date of highest nest count, 2024:

June 12, (as we were monitoring every second day, this date is the result of 2 days of nesting)

## Highest number of nests found in one day, 2024:

The highest number of nests found in one day is 7

## Number of nests documented in 2024:

34 nests laid and marked in spring of 2024

## Survival rate in 2024:

570 turtles fledged out of 815 eggs laid. This equals a 70% survival rate (16% unviable eggs, 13% dead hatchlings in nest, and 1% predated eggs)

## Notes about weeding or site repair/maintenance completed this year:

- Rototilling was not required again this year (this is the second year that we have not done any rototilling).
- An additional section of the fence was added on the north end of Bed A due to low water levels in order to protect from skunk predation.



- Annual weeding and fence repair completed

Notes about concerns or issues that came up during the season?

- South end of C and the North end of Bed D (6.5") are a bit shallow and could use more sand substrate in the future.
- We received a box of approx. 12 flat grate style nest protectors from the Ministry. They have sharp edges which will have to be filed down prior to use in 2025
- A number of areas along the fence are in need of extra support between the metal posts. I received additional wooden stakes from the Ministry this fall, which will be used in the spring of 2025.

Anything you found interesting this season?

- On our first field day in the spring on April 18, there were already 22 nests with emergent holes. That is 33% of the nests!
- In nest number 40 on Bed C Section 55-3.4 the nesting material was quite shallow and the turtle sizes were quite variable. Three turtles were very small (21mm wide and 24mm long) and one was very large (26mm wide and 30mm long). Typical sizes in other nests were 22mm wide and 28mm long.
- Raccoon activity was found again on the beds but again did not result in predation. Just random shallow diggings. Confirmed with a Game Cam.
- We gave a Turtle Bed tour to the Fish & Wildlife Compensation Program delegates on April 22.
- We had Turtle Day on April 23 hosted by the Fish & Wildlife Compensation Program and Rocky Mountain Naturalist volunteers. Sand was donated by Salvador Ready Mix for the display nesting site.
- We have a very diligent Rocky Mountain Naturalist volunteer base, that contributed 32 volunteer hours including members Theckla, Cal, Gaetan, Hilary, Jim, Pamela, Susan M, Marilyn D., Anja, Frank, Lourdes, Dina and Daryl as well as a community members Peter and Robin. Volunteers helped with weeding, other than Theckla who also helped with holiday relief.
- We are actively training a fill-in monitor, who has now helped for several years. Her name is Theckla Sawicki and she has provided holiday relief and many volunteer hours. Because she comes out a lot with us, the program is in good hands while we are away and in the future.
- We met with 9 individuals from the community and/or RMNAT members that were interested in learning more about the turtle life cycle.
- 2024 has the lowest nest count (34 nests) that we have encountered. We looked through the old paper documents from Art Gruenig. 2004

had a page showing only 17 nests. We have old documents from Art that we will provide to Chanel Gagnon when she comes in the spring.

- Rocky Mountain Naturalist volunteers have created Turtle basking logs that are now ready to be placed this winter.

Outstanding Items to Consider in Future

- In 2023, we had reports of a few turtles on the highway south of the turtle beds and entered into discussions with the adjacent private land owner, Jerry Toves to discuss long term fencing opportunities on his property. He plans to put up an elk fence in the future. The Rocky Mountain Naturalists or FWCP could consider adding finer mesh fencing to the lower portion of that fence to keep the turtles from crossing the highway.
- There was some concern mentioned at the last turtle day about length of time the turtles should be in the aquarium. Hopefully we can learn more about this, so we know how to treat them safely on Turtle Day. I've included this topic on the Turtle Symposium Registration Application.

**Turtle nesting Information 2016 – 2022**

Year	# Nests	Eggs Laid*	Dead Eggs	Dead Turtles	Live in Nest	Emerged On Own	Total Fledged	% Nests Predated
2015/16	62	718	137	49	111	421	532	
2016/17	89	993	297	92	195	425	606	1%
2017/18	116	1211	433	91	335	259	394	33%
2018/19	98	673	17	4	9	4	13	93%
2019/20	100	952**	333	223	69	124	193	50%
2020/21	104	1417	256	110	131	888	1019	6%
2021/22	97	1217	224	179	154	315	469	36%
2022/23	69	953	146	30	137	502	639	25%
2023/24	66	815	130	104	143	427	570	1.5%

\* does not include eggs removed by predators

\*\* 1400 is the more likely #, using 14 eggs average laid per predated nest, as we never did find all of the predated eggshells

In 2024, there were 34 nests laid. As of November 2024, none of these have been predated.

# **Rocky Mountain Trench Natural Resources Society Report January 2025**

**Respectfully submitted by: Jo-Ellen Floer**

The Trench Society continues to work on multi-year projects for wildlife habitat enhancement and ecosystem restoration through ingrowth thinning, invasive species management, wetland creation, and prescribed burning.

Some 2024 Projects were:

- Indian Springs north of the Airport - SAR Bird Species inventory completed. Vegetation monitoring in area burned during the 2023 Aq'am Wildfire
- Prepare two pastures for prescribed burning in 2025
- Big Ranch Ecosystem Enhancement Project – planted large stock (75 x 10-gallon Sx Spruce trees)
- Wycliffe Corridor Project – installation of new fences and removal of fences in other areas.
- Lakit - Bighorn winter range improvements to enhance escape terrain, water sources, and removal of ingrowth.
- Wigwam Flats – continuation of thinning for ecosystem restoration. Develop 3 more prescriptions for Bighorn sheep ecosystems enhancement
- Steeples/Peckham's – first of a 5 year project to improve 163ha of grasslands, enhance Bighorn Sheep winter range and improve the Norbury wetland
- East White – aerial seeding project of the 2019 wildfire

Funding sources for the above projects are: Provincial Range Branch, Canada Nature Fund, Columbia Basin Trust Large Environmental Grant, and Nature Trust BC

Species at Risk (SAR) surveys at Indian Springs (north of airport), Lost Springs (south of Tata Creek), and lower Wigwam for Flammulated Owls, Short-eared Owls, Lewis's woodpeckers, Williamson's Sapsucker, Norther Goshawk, and American Badger are complete. If you wish to see a copy of the report "East Kootenay Trench Species at Risk Surveys", please contact me.

## **Cavity Nesting Group Duck Box Report, Fall 2023**

**Respectfully submitted by: Katrin Powell**

The Cavity Nesting Group can be very proud of their efforts in 2024. We officially began as a group in 2022. Yes, it has been 3 years since the beginning of the program! Before 2022, the RMNats cleaned out boxes at Elizabeth Lake, but it was not done every single year, and we did not measure the eggs and so the data is not good enough to determine what species.

Since 2022, the CNG group has taken the 'duck boxes' to a whole new level by watching the boxes during nesting season to better understand the cavity nesting

species present and to observe behaviour, cleaning the boxes every year and recording the contents, and putting up more boxes at Elizabeth Lake and adding boxes in other areas which has now created an opportunity to learn about other cavity nesting species, not just ducks! We have gone from 10 boxes at Elizabeth Lake before the program started to 23 boxes in 5 different areas in 2024. These new areas all have water but are in different habitats and are attracting some new use not seen at Elizabeth Lake. We are still deciphering the results.

Specifically in 2024, we added boxes in the McGinty Lake, Ft Steele and Rampart areas.

Our 23 boxes are now located at:

- Elizabeth Lake (13 boxes -our group built 3 of these, new ones are on Forest trail)
- McGinty Lake (2 new duck boxes) Thanks to Theckla for being the lead on this area
- Irrigation Fields/Rampart (5 boxes: 3 are new duck boxes from our group, one smaller 'owl box' and an old red box installed by the alternate school; there are more old red boxes out there, but we are only monitoring one that we modified to be openable, the others are not getting duck use based on a previous year of observation and clean-out). Thanks to Jim for being the lead on Rampart.
- Community Forest, Four Lakes (1 box -an old box from early RMNat members we readopted)
- Ft Steele, Westport (2 new boxes -one needs to be relocated as it is no longer accessible in summer. We will also replace the one on the river with a larger sized box in hopes to attract a Common merganser. Thanks to Mags for communicating with adjacent land owners in this area.

In 2024 we had 20 RMNat volunteers who helped with either cleaning out the boxes, monitoring boxes and/or making boxes. Thank you to everyone! This seems to be a pretty steady number for the last few years. Some people only like certain aspects of the program and that's great! We try to put people towards their interest, whether it's to sit and observe in nature, or to carry around a ladder or supplies through the bush to clean boxes and/or to stay at home and build/repair boxes. We are also branching out to include research during the winter months and to learn about all the cavity nesting species in the area.

A Big Thank You to all of our Volunteer Monitors!!!!

## A Summary of the Cavity Nesting Bird Species in the East Kootenays

(**Bold** are ones we have confirmed using the boxes in this program)

Cavity Nesting Duck Species	Cavity Nesting Birds
<b>BAGO - Barrows Goldeneye</b>	<b><i>AMKE – American Kestrel (possibly -to be confirmed with research)</i></b>
<b>COGO - Common Goldeneye</b>	<b><i>EUST – European Starling (possibly -to be confirmed with research)</i></b>
<b>HOME - Hooded Merganser</b>	<b><i>HOWR – House Wren (possibly to be confirmed with research)</i></b>
<b>WODU - Wood Duck</b>	<b><i>NSWO – Northern Saw-whet Owl (possibly-to be confirmed with research)</i></b>
<b>BUFF – Bufflehead</b>	<b><i>NOFL – Northern Flicker (possibly-to be confirmed with research)</i></b>
COME -Common Merganser (rivers)	FLOW – Flammulated Owl
	NOPO – Northern Pygmy Owl
	WESO – Western Screech Owl

### Elizabeth Lake

Year	# boxes	Used by Ducks	Used by Other Cavity Nesting Birds	Used by Squirrels or Flying Squirrels	Species that Used Boxes	Percent of boxes with successful fledging of cavity nesting birds
2022	13	69%	0%	0%	BAGO, HOME, COGO, WODU	46%
2023	13	77%	8%	8%	BAGO, WODU Possibly EUST	54%
2024	13	<b><i>Opening boxes in spring 2025</i></b>				

## McGinty Lake

Year	# boxes	Used by Ducks	Used by Other Cavity Nesting Birds	Used by Squirrels or Flying Squirrels	Species that Used Boxes	Percent of boxes with successful fledging of cavity nesting birds
2024	2	0%	0%	0%	n/a	0%

Note: Boxes were possibly not used as they were put up this year a bit late, being the first week of April.

## Irrigation Fields/Rampart

Year	# boxes	Used by Ducks	Used by Other Cavity Nesting Birds	Used by Squirrels or Flying Squirrels	Species that Used Boxes	Percent of boxes with successful fledging of cavity nesting birds
2022	4*	0%	50%	25% (old red box)	Possibly Owl** and AMKE**	50%
2023	4	25%	50%	0%	BUFF, Possibly AMKE** and HOWR**	0%
2024	5	20%	60%	40%	Possibly Owl** and AMKE** and NoFL** <b>Need to open again</b>	80% <b>(still need to open again as baby flying squirrel was on previous duck nest obscuring results)</b>

\*We also monitored a lot of old small red boxes from the alternate school but they did not get used so we did not keep most of these in our program and did not include the results here in order to help with comparing the data.

\*\*Species still to be determined with additional research

## Community Forest

Year	# boxes	Used by Ducks	Used by Other Cavity Nesting Birds	Used by Squirrels or Flying Squirrels	Species that Used Boxes	Percent of boxes with successful fledging of cavity nesting birds
2022	1*	100%	0%	0%	BAGO	100%
2023	1	100%	0%	0%	BAGO	100%
2024	1	100%	0%	0%	COGO	0%

## Fort Steele

Year	# boxes	Used by Ducks	Used by Other Cavity Nesting Birds	Used by Squirrels or Flying Squirrels	Species that Used Boxes	Percent of boxes with successful fledging of cavity nesting birds
2024	2	<i>Opening boxes in spring 2025</i>				

We are an open group and any RMNat Member is welcome.

Please Contact Katrin [littletree1973@gmail.com](mailto:littletree1973@gmail.com) or Greg [greggross1950@gmail.com](mailto:greggross1950@gmail.com)

if interested and we can provide you with more information.

## **ELIZABETH LAKE REPORT for 2024** Respectfully submitted by: **Stewart Wilson**

This is Year 3 of 5 for the Elizabeth Lake Ecosystem Enhancement Project. Volunteers continued tending the native plant plots, weeding, and watering as needed, particularly during the heat of July and August. The four cottonwood plots planted in the fall of 2023 may require some replanting next spring as the overall success rate was 57/89 or 64% (July 2024 inventory). 3 spruce saplings were planted in August. After a lengthy wait approval was given by the Ministry of Environment in the fall for placing turtle basking logs in the lake, which will be anchored on shore. This will take place in winter when it is safe to do so.

A viewing platform by the concrete hide, a large wooden shelter over a picnic table, as well as a new wooden dock have proved popular with visitors. These new additions were all funded by a federal grant secured by the City, which also resulted



in an outdoor toilet, upgrades to popular trails, and Welcome to Confederation Park information signs.

Turtle Day, held on April 23, was well attended with 6 classes from 3 schools learning about the Western Painted Turtle, while enjoying engaging activities including handling baby turtles. During Open House from 2:30 till 4:30, more than 500 members of the community attended. Thanks to the Fish and Wildlife Compensation Program for their continued support (since 2014), and for funding Turtle Day t-shirts which were on sale; Ktunaxa Chief Joe Pierre for his welcoming speech; and the many volunteers, who made this day such a success. Turtle Day will be held on April 22, 2025.

There were three weeding work bees in May, and a clean up at the end of October involving brush sawing around planted plots, removal of landscape fabric and stakes, as well as logs which had served their purpose as borders along trails.

In July volunteers worked with 30 children in the City Playground Program on two mornings, one involving activities in and around the wooden dock, and the other along the Lake Trail.

A summer social was held at Elizabeth Lake on August 25, with George and Rachel and family hosting a potluck supper at the Elizabeth Lake Lodge, after attendees had enjoyed mini golf or a walk on the trails.

In September Ducks Unlimited removed cattails which were choking the outflow channel to prevent possible undermining of the weir during freshet.

According to eBird, Elizabeth Lake was once again the top hotspot with 159 species observed in 2024. The early morning birding group visited at regular intervals during the year, and an increasing number of visiting birders were seen during the spring, summer and fall.

## **Kootenay Conservation Program 2024**

**Respectfully submitted by: Helga Knot**

I participated in the KCP Winter Webinar Series, Season 8, from January 18 th through March 21 st , 2024. There were eight webinars over the course of the winter, presented on Thursday afternoons.

Columbia Mountain Institute (CREDtalks) and KCP collaborated to organize and present the series, which was called Wildlife Corridors and Ecological Connectivity.

The webinars included:

- Landscape connectivity from a wildlife biologist's perspective

- What is a landscape architect and how can they contribute to land use planning and wildlife habitat?
- All Living Things: A cultural approach to reconcile First Nations stewardship rights with resource management
- Integrated Fire Management Planning: Mitigating risk to the ecological integrity and function of regional connectivity corridors
- Roads, roads, and more roads: The plight of animal movement in the Anthropocene
- A global overview of wildlife crossings – examples of maintaining functional connectivity across roads for a variety of species
- The trappings of success: the critical role of social carrying capacity in fostering long-term human-grizzly bear coexistence promoting safe and functioning wildlife corridors
- Context matters – landscape connectivity and ecological integrity

All the 2024 webinars, and those from previous years, have been recorded and can be found at: <https://kootenayconservation.ca/winter-webinar-series-recordings/>

## **2024 RMN Year-end Report**

**Respectfully submitted by: Dianne Cooper**

Weebly RMN Website Forms going to Emails:

RMN Newsletter, Christmas Bird Counts - sw.bc.cbc@gmail.com

RMN Checklists & Products - caldernahm@gmail.com

RMN Calendar - gprogers@telus.net

Join RMN - rmnmembership@gmail.com

Access to site / contributors:

rmnaturalists@gmail.com – general

dccaution@gmail.com – Dianne – general

gprogers@telus.net – Paula - calendar

susanwalp@gmail.com – Susan W. – publish newsletter

jdivekyw@gmail.com – Jackie Diveky-Wells – blog and club photos for website

RMN internet presence:

Website on Weebly:

Password is now held by the secretary and/or president using login name "rmnaturalists@gmail.com".

Jackie Diveky-Wells was added as an editor to the website and she is posting some blog articles and club photos submitted by club members

People with access to modify the webpage are now

- Dianne Cooper - webmaster
- Paula Rogers - calendar
- Greg Ross - general
- Susan Walp - newsletter publishing
- Jackie Diveky-Wells - blog and photo posting
- rmnaturalists@gmail.com - main Weebly account

Visitor statistics: Our subscription does not allow us to see annual statistics.

Forms on the website go to:

- Marianne - general inquiries, checklists and products for sale, Christmas Bird Count registration
- RMN membership gmail - membership questions
- Paula - calendar / field trip questions
- Susan Walp (rmnatskestrel@gmail.com) - newsletter requests and submissions

Facebook:

[www.facebook.com/groups/RockyMtnNats/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/RockyMtnNats/)

Our private facebook group now has 303 members (280 in 2023, 250 in 2022) of which 139 people were "active". Top posters of photos were Claude Rioux, Helga and a few others. Claude has now "retired" from the area so we will miss her beautiful photos and thank her for her much appreciated contributions

Administrators / moderators are Dianne, Helga and Theckla. There have been no social issues this year.

Skookumchuck Prairie Key Biodiversity Area:

In 2024, Skookumchuck Prairie was transitioned from an Important Bird Area (IBA) to a Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) due to its significant population of Lewis' Woodpecker, Long-billed Curlew, and antelope bitter brush.

The KBA was featured on the Birds Canada website in March, 2024:

[Celebrating the launch of new Key Biodiversity Areas for birds in Canada - Birds Canada | Oiseaux Canada](#)

#### Land donation:

A major land donation of 270 hectares of private land within the KBA was made in the spring to Nature Conservancy Canada by the J2 Ranch. This parcel is on either side of the road to Mardis sawmill and includes the field experimentally planted with crested wheat-grass. It is part of the main Long-billed Curlew habitat on the Prairie.

[NCC: Where We Work - British Columbia - Important bird habitat now protected in the Rocky Mountain Trench](#)

#### Field trips:

I made 5 trips to various parts of the KBA in 2024 including a field trip with the British Columbia Field Ornithologist on June 5. I did not go on the Wings Over the Rockies field trip this year but Randy Harris did do one.

#### Solar:

The latest (autumn 2023) crown land application for developing a solar farm on Skookumchuck Prairie is still "Under Review" by the BC Lands Branch. The Regional District of East Kootenay does not support this application.

#### Research on the Prairie:

Tagging with GPS transmitters of LEWO planned by Environment Canada last year did not proceed. Tagging with GPS transmitters of Long-billed Curlew by Birds Canada is now being proposed for 2024. This will involve the use of drones with thermal cameras to detect nests.

#### iNaturalist:

Observations of all plants and animals within the KBA now stands at 4,061 observations of 667 species by 154 people. Most observations are of spiders, insects, and plants.

#### Christmas Bird Counts - Cranbrook and Kimberley:

This was our 27<sup>th</sup> official Christmas Bird Count (CBC) for Cranbrook and Kimberley and the fourth for Jaffray. Marianne Nahm organized Jaffray and Cranbrook and Carol Fairhurst will organize Kimberley (Jan 2025). Jo Ellen Floer summarized Jaffray and I will do the data entry for all three. See write-ups to be posted on our website.

#### East Kootenay Bird Checklist:

I have updated my files for the "official" printed bird checklist and it is ready for printing.

This involved updating the taxonomy of bird species, updating the seasonal occurrence (bar chart), and formatting for printing.

I also created digital documents for all species considered in the region which should be backed up in a location other than my computer.

Two new species were recorded in the region in 2024: Canada Warbler and Field Sparrow; but we still have 329 species – the same as 2023 due to loss /invalidation of one species (White-headed Woodpecker) and “lumping” of Pacific-slope and Cordilleran Flycatcher back to both just Western Flycatcher.

eBird Review:

<https://ebird.org/about>

I am the reviewer for bird records and media entered on eBird for the Regional District of East Kootenay. It is my job (volunteer) to review rare species, check the accuracy of media and checklist effort, communicate with observers about possible errors, and setup and adjust the "filter" - which is a spreadsheet that the eBird database uses to compare what was seen with what can be expected then flag rarities for my review.

I reviewed approximately, 150 items, which involved probably twice that many emails. There were 1,797 photos and 6,838 checklists submitted for the region by 650 eBirders. I believe I checked all the photos.

This year, a co-reviewer was added by eBird Central administration to the East Kootenay, Gary Davidson of Nakusp, who also reviews Central Kootenay, and other regions of the province.