

# **Rocky Mountain Naturalists Annual Committee**

## **Reports**

### **2026**

#### **Bat Committee 2025**

Respectfully submitted by: **Scott Bodaly**



Hello from the bat committee

My season with the bats was interesting. Wildlife Conservation Society Canada contracted me to maintain and monitor 12 bat habitat modified trees in Wycliffe. The trees all had guano traps added at the bases.

We began the season with an early visit (before bat arrival) to clear the traps of wind-blown debris and do any repairs needed. Over the next 5 months we visited 5 times to collect guano from the 12 separate guano traps. Guano volume was recorded and guano was mailed off for testing. The samples were tested for presence of white nose syndrome and species of bat using the modified tree.

The location of the modified trees is great for a walk or bike ride only about a kilometre or two from parking. It has beautiful views of the St. Mary's River and valley and hoodoos. No news yet regarding results of guano testing from the season.

On one of the collection dates a group of naturalists joined the outing.





Bats in British Columbia continue to be healthy. White nose syndrome is in Washington State but hasn't yet crossed the border. When white nose syndrome does infect the colonies in British Columbia it is possible that it may kill as many as 90% of our bats.

Like other wildlife, their habitat is threatened by development of areas and by logging of our forests in particular old growth stands. Bats depend on trees for roosting in the summer. Bat houses definitely help but bats in general prefer the natural roosts.

We will see what 2026 has in store for the bats.

## **Rocky Mountain Naturalists**

### **Club Camp 2025**

**Respectfully submitted by: Jackie Leach**

Club Camp 2025 at Canyon, BC, east of Creston June 1-4

The Rocky Mountain Naturalists Annual Club Camp took place from June 1 to June 4 at the Canyon Community Park Campground. It was a lovely rural campground and provided us with early morning entertainment of the sound of coyotes yipping, roosters crowing and wild turkeys gobbling.

We had excellent attendance at this year's camp, with 42 people in attendance. Most people camped, a few more were in hotels and some came out just for the day. This year we had six people from the West Kootenay Naturalists join us.

A huge thank you to all the people who stepped up to lead early morning birding, hiking, paddling and biking. Each day we had early morning birding at the campground then two different outings in the morning and two in the afternoon. The walking or hiking outings we did were Creston Wetlands, Balancing Rock hike, Ladyslipper Trail Hike - where one lovely white mountain Ladyslipper was viewed, Billy Goat Bluff hike, and William Creek Falls hike. Hikes are planned to attract different levels of hiking skills. As well, paddling Frenchman's Slough took place with participants in different watercraft. On the last day we cycled to the Rookery on the edge of Creston's Wetlands.

A highlight of the week was going to the Swan Valley Honey Farm where a very interesting tour and talk were given by owner Amanda Goodman Lee. We were given the opportunity to buy their honey which included many different flavours of creamed honey.

The evenings back at camp included a group potluck the first night by the fire, a weiner roast the next night and the last evening about 25 of us went to the local pub for a dinner out.

One of the best things about the 3 days was beautiful sunny weather. Hope we can be so lucky this year.

The 2026 camp hasn't been decided on yet but keep your spring weeks open in late May or early June.

Your camp organizers Jackie, Paula and Betty

**East Kootenay Invasive Species Council 2025**  
**Respectfully submitted by: Frank Hastings – RMNats Rep**

EKISC mainly manages weeds on public lands.

In the spring of 2025, EKISC was really worried about Montana cutting back on their Zebra and Quagga Mussels control program because of politics. Once the mussels invade a territory, there is no going back. Fortunately, Alberta has been stepping up with their control and Inspection Stations that help keep B.C. mussel-free.

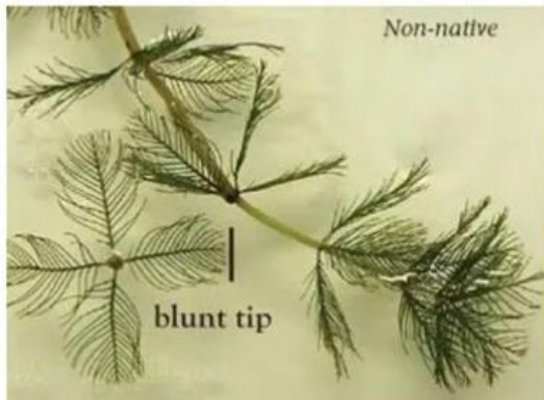
This year, EKISC explored and evaluated the Pickering Hills to create a comprehensive Invasive Species Management Plan.

EKISC posted Webinars on: preventing the spread of Northern Pike in southern B.C., using Invasive weeds as medicinals and edibles, salves, and artwork.

EKISC examined Watermilfoil in RDEK lakes to make sure it was Native to B.C.

Eurasian watermilfoil can be identified by its long, slender reddish-brown stems and delicate, feather-like leaves arranged in whorls of four. Each leaflet typically has 12 or more thin segments, and if you lift a piece from the water, the leaves collapse and fall limp, unlike our native northern watermilfoil, whose leaves stay firm and spread out.

### Invasive Eurasian Watermilfoil



- Usually 12-21 leaflet pairs per leaf
- Delicate, feather-like leaves
- Leaflets are mostly the same length
- Leaves arranged in whorls (circles) of three to five around each stem
- Leaves are limp when out of water
- Stem is as thick or thicker than a pencil and is long and spaghetti-like

### Native Northern Watermilfoil



- Usually 7-10 leaflet pairs per stem
- Rigid feather-like leaves form a Christmas tree shape
- Lower leaflets are usually quite long
- Leaves arranged in whorls (circles) of four to six around stem
- Leaves are usually rigid when out of water
- Stem is usually whitish, or whitish-green in color

EKISC also participated in community events like Farmer's Markets, Garden Club Tours and "Take me Outside" sessions with local schools that connect students to nature. EKISC is thankful for financial support from Columbia Basin Trust.

Below is a summary of EKISC's achievements in 2025.



**Bluebird Trail Report for 2025**  
**Respectfully submitted by: Marianne Nahm**

The Rocky Mountain Naturalists Club nest box routes continued to have 29 actively monitored trails with 28 monitors submitting data. This year we had 429 boxes available for nesting. Western and Mountain Bluebirds occupied 188 while Tree Swallows used 167 boxes. Incidental users included a House Wren, a White-breasted Nuthatch and two Mountain Chickadee families. Occasionally, Red and Northern Flying Squirrels raise a family in one of the nest boxes.

Since 2015, when we began collecting detailed statistics, Mountain Bluebirds use of the boxes has almost doubled and in 2022 and 2023 almost tripled. This year 328 Mountain Bluebirds fledged with 88% success rate, from hatched to fledged.

Western Bluebirds did quite well this year with a 94% success rate from chicks to fledged. Monitors have reported anecdotally and expressed concerns that there appeared to be fewer insect hatches during the critical times of June and July when all Swallows are searching for flying food sources to feed their young.

Thank you to the Cranbrook men's Shed for constructing a set of nest boxes. These are used as replacements for old and damaged boxes on our trails. We also sell some boxes which helps cover the cost of building materials.

Thank you to all our dedicated volunteer monitors who consistently check their boxes and record their data. Monitors report that this is a very enjoyable, enriching activity, often sharing interesting sightings and experiences that are not necessarily always bird related.



Five young chipmunks bedded down for the night in a nest box on the Rice Trail off Pighin Rd. Photo – Marianne.



A Northern Flying Squirrel making a home in one of the nest boxes. Photo – Jeanette.

## **Early Morning Birding – Wednesday Mornings 2025**

**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.

The primary objective of EMB is the spotting, identification and submitting of regular, accurate lists to eBird.

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 2025, naturalists took advantage of 47 opportunities to search for and record many of the bird species which occur in the southern Rocky Mountain Trench region. Some February mornings were too cold for us. And some Wednesdays were missed because guided outings were provided within the context of the Great Backyard Bird Count and Club Camp.

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.

Our core group of regular participants, a dozen naturalists, made significant strides in 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.

At the end of each EMB session, we discuss options for the following week. 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 facts about a bird or a situation provide food for thought, elevating the level of curiosity. This past year, the notice has also been posted on our RMNats Facebook page for further exposure.

## **Ram Creek Ecological Reserve Warden Annual Report – December, 2025**

**Respectfully submitted by: Marianne Nahm**

Ram Creek Warm Springs – ER #28  
Warden: Rocky Mountain Naturalists Club

Volunteer Hours – 56 hours

Submitted by Marianne Nahm on behalf of RMNats Club

### **One visit – Sunday, August 24, 2025**

Eight naturalists walked into the Ram Creek pools via Ram Creek FSR. There were no cars at the parking lot upon arrival. It was a cool start but by the mid-afternoon when we returned to the vehicles it was 27 degrees C.

The trail on the way in had no litter and several downed trees which would prevent any two wheeled access. At the pools, there was very little litter and evidence of one campfire located at the upper pool edge. Rocks and burned debris were removed. The upper pool temperature was 35 degrees C, middle pool 30 degrees C and lower pool 31 degrees C. A large Western Toad (*Anaxyrus boreas*) was hunkered down, well camouflaged, at the upper pool edge.

Above the pools along the creek, we clipped seed heads from Annual Sow Thistle (*Sonchus oleraceus*), and Goatsbeard (*Tragopogon dubius*) and pulled Oxeye Daisy (*Leucanthemum vulgare*) plants. There appeared to be many fewer Bull Thistle plants (*Cirsium vulgare*) than previous years. Poison ivy plants continue to thrive on the western edges 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.

Several young families from the Kimberley and Cranbrook area arrived at the pools as we were bagging the invasive plants. We warned them about the poison ivy. On the walk back out to the vehicles, we stopped at the old logging landing which continues to host Spotted Knapweed (*Centaurea stoebe*) although the number of plants has been much reduced due to annual pulling and bagging. We saw several more groups of people heading to the pools.

An ebird list was completed with 11 species recorded. Photos were taken by Ian Adams and Gretchen Whetham that can be accessed in the Ram Creek inaturalist project. <https://inaturalist.ca/projects/ram-creek-ecological-reserve>



Gretchen and Ian taking photos for the inaturalist Ram Creek Project.



Looking for birds.

# **Upper Columbia Basin Environmental Collaborative (UCBEC) report 2025**

**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.

Last year the treaty reached the end of its 60-year minimum term and was under renegotiation. Despite intense legal negotiations at the end of the year, a long-term agreement was not reached before the change of government in the USA. There is no sign that negotiations will restart any time soon; a short-term interim agreement has satisfied most US demands but there may be further discussion closer to September 2027 when Canada's interim flood control guarantee expires. Despite the suspension of active Treaty negotiations, ecosystem-function modelling continues.

In the interim agreement, BC's required water storage for flood risk management was reduced, providing potential for habitat enhancement. BC Hydro is identifying costs of lost electricity production and looking at releasing flows to support salmon reaching the ocean and being able to return upstream, how to avoid the extreme lows experienced by the Arrow Lakes recently, and continuing the work to create habitat around the reservoirs.

2025 has seen a decline in environmental priorities across the three governments of Canada, BC and USA. This environmental drift is very concerning for our CRT objectives. Given the forecasted further industrialisation of the landscape and the thirst for electricity, it may be difficult to put forth an argument to reduce energy production at any of the dams in favour of environmental objectives. We continue to lobby the government through the office of Adrian Dix, the Minister responsible for the CRT.

Public education also continues. In September UCBEC member Graeme Lee Rowlands of Wildsight Golden organized two "Columbia River Conversations" – in-depth weekend visits to Revelstoke and Castlegar (<https://wildsight.ca/programs/columbia-river/columbia-river-conversations/>). Following their success, it is anticipated that in 2026 there will be single-day knowledge-sharing trips to different reservoir locations when the levels are low. This may include Kooanusa, which could be of particular interest to RMN members. An announcement will be sent out to the membership when a date is determined.

## **RMNats 2025 Fall Turtle report**

**Respectfully submitted by: Theckla Sawicki**

### **Date 2025 spring monitoring began:**

- March 26, 2025 – Started monitoring turtle beds. Unfortunately, Bed A had been fully predated. Egg shells were up on the surface beside the majority of the nests. All nests had protection, but they were either 1' round, tall cages or 1' square heavy metal grates.
- April 1, 2025 – Further predation on Bed A, more eggshells on the surface. Bed B nest 19 – eggshells on the surface, 8 other digs, but nothing else predated. Bed C nest 6 – possible fall emergent hole. No digging on Beds C, D or E.
- April 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>, 2025 – Trail camera set up to see what was predated Bed A – a Raccoon cooperated fully by climbing on and off the bed right by the camera. This was not a skunk predation as first thought.
- April 5, 2025 – Newly designed 2' square cages built from re-bar and ½" mesh and added to nests on Beds C, D, and E as predation was so heavy on Bed A.

### **Date 2025 spring monitoring ended (digging out and looking for new nests):**

- July 18, 2025 was the last visit with the hope of finding new nests. July 13<sup>th</sup> declared the official last nest laid day.

### **Prepared and weeded the beds 2025 in preparation for new nests:**

- From April 22 to May 9, 2025, nests were cleaned and counted, and beds fully weeded, ready for new nests to be laid.

### **# of visits throughout 2025:**

- I made 78 visits to the turtle beds as of October 24<sup>th</sup> including dates covered by relief workers.

**Date of first turtle nest laid, 2025 – May 28, 2025**

**Date of last turtle nest laid, 2025 – July 13, 2025**

### **Date of highest nest count, 2025:**

- June 25<sup>th</sup> had the highest nest count (10), June 27<sup>th</sup> ran a close second (9).

**Number of nests documented in 2025 – 62 nests laid and marked**

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

- The work that took up the most time this past season was building new nest protection cages. In all, we built 15 2' rebar and ½" mesh cages that were installed and used this past season. Recently received a donation through the RMNats, and 5 more cages have been built, ready to use next season.
  - I took all of the 1' round cages and re-purposed them. Some I added 2' skirts to so that the raccoons couldn't dig in from the edges, some had ½" mesh added inside so the raccoon couldn't get through.
  - At this time, any cages that are 1' round or square will be discontinued next season, the raccoons are simply digging their way in from the side. Two nests have been fully predated already that had smaller cages covering them.
- The fence on the north end of Bed A is quite tall. There was heavy deer presence on Bed A this year, and they were slowly breaking the fence. Small "logs" were added to the top from post to post for better support – continued with the same work that had been done other years. Over the season, added 20 supports on the tops of the fenceline to help keep the fence standing strong.



- Weeding – Two days were spent doing hard weeding on the turtle beds this year. The first day was to help prep the beds for the new nests, the second weeding day was after all of the nests were laid. Both days were done with the help of volunteers from the Rocky Mountain Naturalists.
- Knapweed – this is a growing threat to the areas around the turtle beds. Over the course of the season, 16 full garbage bags of knapweed were disposed of. This didn't include lighter pulls while checking the beds.

- In August, rented a brush trimmer and started clearing along some of the fencelines. This was necessary as the fence is gradually disappearing in the grass and shrubs, which makes it hard for animals (mostly deer, but now also elk in the area) to see the fence as well as me. This also allows me to walk along the fenceline to get the furthest nesting Bed – E – rather than on a trail through the field. Pictured below, the cleared fenceline after a few months of growth, the fenceline that has not yet been done – it needs to be addressed next season.



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

- The Raccoon threat is increasing now that they found the beds in the spring. Over the course of the 2025 season, the racoons visited 23 times, with increasing regularity September and October. Bed A seems to hold their interest the most, attempting to get at the nests every visit. There were a couple of smaller cages/grates used originally, but they simply dug around them. New, larger cages were created throughout the season, and although the racoons are digging in from the edges, they are not able to get to the nests in the center.

### **Anything you found interesting this season?**

- On June 6<sup>th</sup>, a yellow-bellied marmot moved onto Bed C. It dug its way in under the fence. It's first den was dug directly ON Bed C, but it then moved between Beds D and E and built a warren of dens there. It left a week later, digging its way out under the fence in the exactly place it had dug its way in. It did not disturb the turtle nests.



- One new member to the Rocky Mountain Naturalists – Anthony Amsel – did Turtle Nesting Research in Ontario. He spent many evenings watching the nesting beds, getting lots of video of the nesting process along with many pictures of turtles laying. **Discovered that from start to finish, the laying of a turtle nest takes approximately two hours.**
- Learned that the “water” the turtles carry is also used at the bottom of the nest, not just to create the protective over-layer. Anthony was able to take a picture of an abandoned nest, shortly after she had left it. He had watched her come up on shore, find her spot, dig the nest, and then she left.



- This year, there was only one nest that was 100% unviable eggs. It was on Bed C.
- There has been no sign of skunks on the beds this year, only raccoons. The older, smaller, grates and cages have proven ineffective for them. Cages that

are 2' wide, either round or square, seem to be doing the trick. They are getting desperate though, they are trying to dig through the ½' mesh on top. No success though.

- Coyotes are new to the beds this season. They have been coming with great regularity in September and October – 13 visits to date. They don't seem to be digging at all at the nests, but pictures show that they're listening to something under the surface. There are digs on some of the beds, but nothing near any of the nests.



- Feral cats (2) have been frequenting the beds as well. They do not seem at all interested in the nests but do seem to like the north end of Bed B for a litterbox. Since the Coyotes have started doing their visits, the cat visits have slowed down, and down to one cat now.



- September 20<sup>th</sup>, caught a picture of an Elk on Bed A. This was the one and only time, and a first!



- For the first time ever, Bed B-1 is now in use. This is the site where the initial gravel load was dropped when the beds were created. No nests have ever been found in this area, but this year there are 7 of them. Nest protections were added but will have to use heavier cages next year as this is a big thoroughfare for deer. It is also being used by people wanting to get to the point close to the lake for good bird watching. Added stakes and rope along one side of the bed so that measurements can be taken.
- June 18<sup>th</sup>, spent two hours doing a talk and interview with a blogger named Rachel Tancock, The Nature Educator, which was organized through Cranbrook Tourism. Her Instagram video created from that visit can be found here: <https://www.instagram.com/p/DN5zFvjkYhX/>. This site has had numerous hits, which is quite encouraging.
- Turtle Day was held on April 22nd hosted by the Fish & Wildlife Compensation Program and Rocky Mountain Naturalist volunteers. Sand was donated by Salvador Ready Mix for the display nesting site.
- June 25 – I was interviewed on air by Dennis Walker from one of our local radio stations – 107.5 2day FM. He has a great interest in the project and wants to help us inform the public more about what they are, and why they are there. Next season, he is wanting to have live interviews several times in the summer. I'm in favour as the more people know about them, the less they may feel the need to walk or bike on them.



- We had 30 volunteer contributed hours, including RMNat members.
- This year, a group of volunteers formed the “Whacky Weeders”. This group was made up of Dawn, Betty, Anja, Peggy and Marilyn. George (from Elizabeth Lake Lodge) and Stewart helped out greatly one day as well.
- The Turtle Monitoring group numbers also increased this year. Peggy, Betty, Lorraine joined for the first time. Dawn increased her knowledge from prior years, and Jim helped with some vacation relief.

### **Proposed projects for next season – 2025/2026**

- Clear fenceline between Beds A & B – weed whacker and willow cutters will be required. Looking for volunteers.
- Maintain the whipper snipping along the fencelines that were done this past season
- Clear fenceline past Bed E to the farthest end. This was not completed this year, only managed to get partway. Looking for volunteers.
- Added no walking and no biking symbols on the sign out at the Lake. Have also added to the second sign just like it – pictured below. Two more have been ordered.



- Planning to add signs, pictured below, to each of the four signs above. Hoping that more education is the key to keeping people off of the beds.



### Turtle nesting Information 2016 – 2025

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%
2024/25	<b>37</b>	<b>449</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>54.00%</b>
2025/26	<b>62</b>							

\* 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 2025, there were 62 nests laid. As of November 2025, only one of these have been predated.

## Rocky Mountain Trench Natural Resources Society Report January 2026

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, and wetland modification.

Some 2025 projects were:

- Indian Spring just north of the airport (464ha) – Monitoring vegetation response following the 2023 Aq’am fire, removal of hazardous fencing, repaired wetland, and Species at Risk Bird surveys.
- Wycliffe Corridor Project – fence replacement and manual thinning
- Lakie – winter range improvement for Bighorn sheep by removing ingrowth that negatively affects travel corridors and predation. Funded by Canada Nature Fund and Lan Based Investment
- Wigwam Flats – Fernie Rod & Gun Club has a 5 year grant with Columbia Basin Trust. RMTS looking after thinning operations.

- Steeple Enhancement Project at Peckham's (west of Horseshoe lake) – funded by CBC grant. Improvements to grasslands and Bighorn Shep winter range areas. Improve the Norbury Wetland by restricting cattle access. All assessment work completed and contract put out for thinning and pruning. Treat invasive plants through scarification and reseedling.

To see the full report with pictures of activities, please visit

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1kPhvxZOomtmu9dEPsPerHwhxdDsgmHDY/view?usp=drive\\_link](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1kPhvxZOomtmu9dEPsPerHwhxdDsgmHDY/view?usp=drive_link)

The report will be posted for about a month.

## **Cavity Nesting Group Duck Box Report, Fall 2025**

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

The Cavity Nesting Group began as a group in 2022. We have now completed our 4th year of monitoring. The CNG group watches the boxes during nesting season to better understand the cavity nesting species present and to observe behaviour, we clean out the boxes every year and record the contents and try to determine what has used the box.

Every year, our knowledge of the cavity nesting species grows. We have learned so much and have enjoyed sharing our observations and being detectives together. We have 21 Rocky Mountain Naturalists involved in the Cavity Nesting Program, building boxes, watching the boxes from April to June and cleaning out and deciphering the use of the boxes in October. We also get together for a potluck every September/October to share memories from the year. We are open to new members.

We have 23 boxes in 6 different areas in 2025. These areas all have water but are in different habitats and are attracting different use. These are at Elizabeth Lake, Community Forest, Rampart, Irrigation fields, Fort Steele/Westport and McGinty Lake.

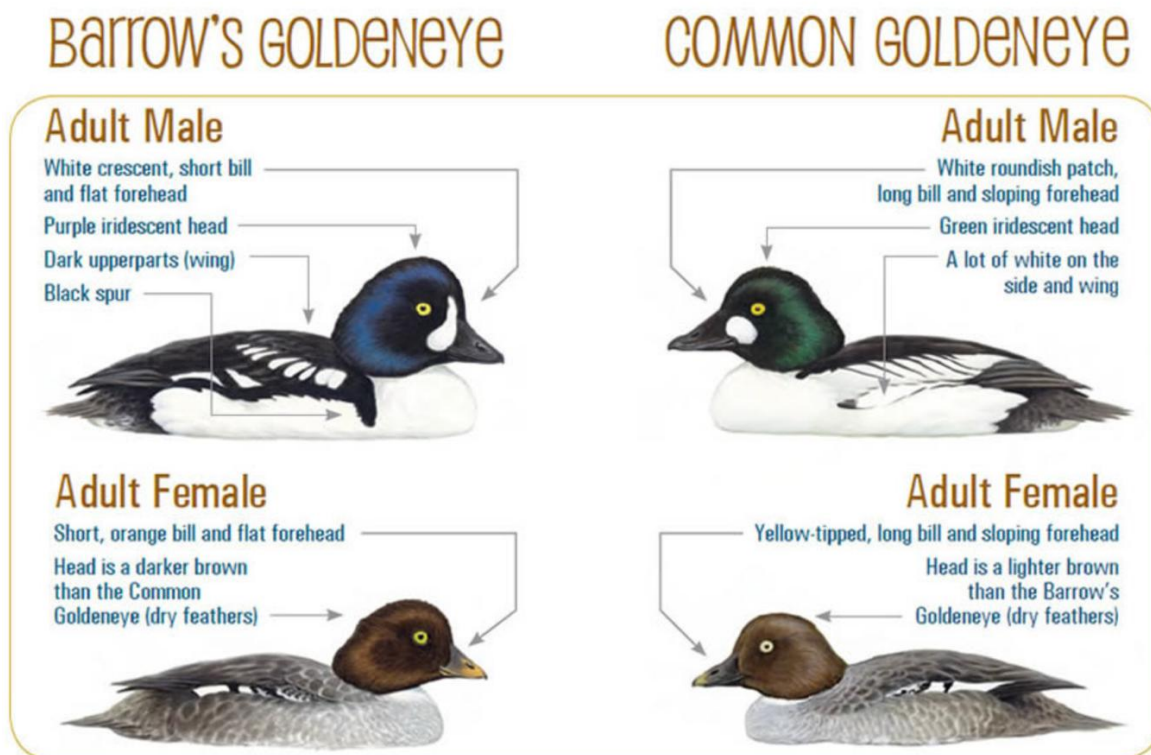
Attached is a detailed account of this year's observations for each of the Cavity Nesting Boxes.

Some of the highlights include;

- We have been able to confirm with egg measurements that both Barrows Goldeneye and Common Goldeneye nest in the boxes at Elizabeth Lake.
- No egg dumping was noted this year.
- One nest box at the irrigation fields has been used three years in a row by an American Kestrel for roosting.

- We have had Flying Squirrels nest at the irrigation field nest boxes for two years. We have noticed that they make little grass bundles that look like a little craft display.
- We were able to obtain a picture of a female Goldeneye coming out of a nest box at Elizabeth Lake. Initially we were excited as we thought we would be able to identify it, but it turns out to still be inconclusive by the experts. There is such a similarity between female COGO and BAGO from mid May onwards during nesting when the bill colour changes.
- We have had Bufflehead species nesting in a CNG box at the irrigation fields for two years.
- We have not had any use of the CNG boxes at Ft Steele/Westport and McGinty for two years (since they were put up).

Thank you to everyone who helped make the program a success and so enjoyable. There are lots of different ways to help and we have a great diversity of people helping with different skills and interests. We try to put people towards their interest, whether it's to sit and observe in nature, or to carry around a ladder or to stay at home and build/repair boxes.



RMNats -Please take photos of female goldeneyes when they are with their mate, to help us learn to ID them. Then we can find the pics on e-bird -Thank you!



Mystery Goldeneye at box 3 Elizabeth Lake May 30



Looking at feathers found in box.



Flying Squirrel at Irrigation Fields.



Deciphering CNG box contents.





Our new larger Common Merganser  
Box at Fort Steele/Westport



Bufflehead eggs at Irrigation Fields.



Group shot at Elizabeth Lake



Group shot at Fort Steele/Westport

## CNG Monitoring Summary 2025 Nesting

Cavity nesting ducks in this area: COGO = Common goldeneye, BAGO = Barrows goldeneye, BUFF = Bufflehead, HOME = Hooded merganser, WODU = Wood duck, COME = Common merganser.

Other cavity nesting species that could use a duck sized box in this area: NSWO = Northern Saw-whet owl, EUST = European starling, HOWR = House wren, AMKE = American kestrel, NOFL = Northern flicker, Red Squirrel, Flying squirrel., WESO (western screech owl a small possibility), FLOW = Flammulated owl (a small possibility)

### Elizabeth Lake

Box #	Monitor	Used by a CNS	If Yes what species	Seen going in and out	Cavity nesting species seen in the area	Result
1 Near brown blind	Jan	Yes	BAGO* or COGO	No	BAGO	Fledged BAGO* most likely, but possibly COGO
Blue/green eggshell fragments indicate BAGO or COGO. BAGO is more likely, as BAGO was seen in area, but not COGO.						
2	NA					
Removed last year						
3 Forest trail	Liza	Yes	COGO or BAGO	Yes	COGO early in season, BAGO and BUFF	Fledged COGO or BAGO
Photo captured a Goldeneye female coming out of nest on May 30. Photo is uncertain as to species although we consulted experts (bill color changes between May 23-end of June, so lots of variability).						

Blue/Green egg shell fragments confirm Goldeneye species, with 6 membranes found, indicating at least 6 chicks fledged.						
4 Forest trail	Liza	Yes	COGO* or BAGO	No	BAGO BUFF HOME (female)	Unsuccessful COGO* (unlikely BAGO)
6 unhatched Blue/Green eggs and 1 broken egg Blue/Green. The eggs were opened to confirm that they were fertilized as chicks had begun to develop. Average Length 59.75 Average width 42.3 Based on observation it is possibly a Barrows, but based on egg size it is most likely Common goldeneye (all eggs were typical of COGO and too small for typical BAGO).						
5 Forest trail	Doug	No	N/A	No	BAGO HOME	Not Used
Empty box. Increased human activity near box, with trails and litter. No woodpecker seen in area this year.						
6 Forest trail	Dawn	Yes	BAGO* or COGO	No	BAGO, BUFF and HOME	<b>Fledged BAGO* most likely, but possibly COGO</b>
Blue/green eggshell fragments plus 1 unhatched egg. Colour indicate BAGO or COGO. Egg size was 65mm long and 48mm wide and is more likely to be the BAGO which is supported by the monitoring.						
7 Hwy side	None	Yes	BAGO or COGO	No		<b>Fledged BAGO or COGO</b>
Lots of blue/green eggshell fragments confirm Goldeneye species with a heavy topping of downy feathers.						
8 Hwy side	None	Yes	BAGO or COGO	No		<b>Fledged BAGO or COGO</b>
Lots of blue/green eggshell fragments with a heavy topping of downy feathers. Blue/Green egg shell fragments confirm Goldeneye species, with 8 membranes found, indicating at least 8 chicks fledged.						
9 Hwy side	Liza	Yes	BAGO or COGO	No		<b>Fledged BAGO or COGO</b>
Lots of blue/green eggshell fragments with a heavy topping of downy feathers. Blue/Green egg shell fragments confirm Goldeneye species, with 6 membranes found, indicating at least 6 chicks fledged.						
10 Hwy side	Liza	Yes	Red Squirrel	No		<b>Fledged Red Squirrel</b>
Deep grass layer is typical of a red squirrel nest. Two pieces of blue/green eggshell found ½ cm by ½ cm on bottom with grass nest on top (5 to 6in deep). We think the squirrel had predated an egg (there was not enough shell to be a whole egg).						
11 Forest trail	Pamela	No	N/A	No	HOME	Not used
Some grass was added by a bird or squirrel. Moved box 10 M north to a straighter tree.						

12 Forest trail	Pamela	No	N/A	No		Not used
13 Forest trail	Marilyn	No	N/A	No		Not used

- \* most likely based on typical egg size and/or species observations in area while monitoring
- 50% of the Elizabeth Lake boxes had fledged ducklings

### Community Forest

Box #	Monitor	Used by a CNS	If Yes what species	Cavity nesting species seen in and out	Cavity nesting species seen in the area	Result
7 Four Lakes	None	Yes	BAGO or COGO	No		<b>Fledged BAGO or COGO</b>
<p>Lots of blue/green eggshell fragments. Blue/Green egg shell fragments confirm Goldeneye species, with 7 membranes found, indicating at least 7 chicks fledged. Grass on top mixed with down, a flicker feather and 3 types of other small feathers. This is likely from another bird species after the fledging of the goldeneye.</p>						

- During cleaning, bluebird box North or Sylvan lake can also be cleaned
- For cleaning, box #7 will be accessed in the fall with a key for the gate from Max's Place

### Rampart

Box #	Monitor	Used by a CNS	If Yes what species	Cavity nesting species seen going in and out	Cavity nesting species seen in the area	Result
1 Largest pond	Jim	Yes	EUST	No	BUFF, BAGO	EUST started nest
<p>A Ponderosa pine needle layer about 1/2 inch deep For cavity nesting birds in this area, only EUST, HOWR and smaller species like chickadees, nuthatches and bluebirds add material. Smaller species have so far not been observed to use duck sized boxes. We have observed that ducks do not add material either, except down.</p>						

Ponderosa needle nests are typical of EUST.

## Irrigation Fields

Box #	Monitor	Used by a CNS	If Yes what species	Cavity nesting species seen going in and out	Cavity nesting species seen in the area	Result
6 1 <sup>st</sup> pond	Marilyn P. & Cindy	Yes	Flying Squirrel	Yes	BUFF, BAGO, HOME	<b>Fledged Flying Squirrel (and BUFF previous year)</b>
<p>Lots of grass with grass wrapped in bundles. We know this to be from a flying squirrel, as we saw it in the spring of 2025 and in the fall of 2024. During those times we did not empty or assess the box. At bottom of nest from the 2024 nesting, we found 3 green/beige oval eggs, 1 egg broken and egg fragments. Eggs were 50 to 51mm long and 36 to 37 mm wide, indicating BUFF chicks fledged last year. The green tinge to the eggs is likely due to discoloration of old eggs. Monitors found white broken egg at base of tree (half an egg) and a bunch of eggs on the trail. We discussed and think this was likely from the flying squirrel having predated a nearby nest and taking one of the eggs to the nest box.</p>						
9 (red) 2 <sup>nd</sup> Pond	Teri & Gaetan	Yes	Red Squirrel	No	HOME	<b>Fledged Red Squirrel</b>
<p>Red indicates a smaller box previously built 20 years ago by the alternate school. We modified one of the boxes so we can open it and clean it out. Box filled 4 inches deep with grass. No hole observed, dust and dirt fines at bottom on top of shavings.</p>						
10 2 <sup>nd</sup> Pond	Teri & Gaetan	Yes	AMKE and ?	No	HOME until mid May	AMKE roosted but what made the nest
<p>About a 1 inch layer of sawdust, deer hair and feathers. 3 Biggish bird poops, 1 inch long, in corner (these poops look the same as the poops found in this box in 2024 and 2023. We've learned that American kestrels do not add material to a nesting cavity, so we do not know what made the nest. No other droppings, so we don't think anything fledged.</p>						
11 owl /BUFF box at Silo Pond	None	Yes	Flying Squirrel	Yes		<b>Flying Squirrel inside, did not open box.</b>
<p>This box is narrower, and not as deep, with a smaller hole than a duck box, in order to attract a BUFF. It also has a second level bird box at the bottom, which was added as we were shortening the box for a BUFF. This box has had a NSWOW in previous years. During duck box opening on Oct 23/25 the group observed a flying squirrel looking out of the nest box hole.</p>						

### Ft Steele/ Westport

Box #	Monitor	Used by a CNS	If Yes what species	Cavity nesting species seen going in and out	Cavity nesting species seen in the area	Result
1 River	Lorraine	No ?	N/A	No		Not used for a nest
There was a small depression in the corner. We do not know what caused this.						
2 Wetland	Mags (we watch this box from 100m away as this is in WODU area)	No	N/A	No	WODU COGO BUFF	Not used
WODU seen Apr 16 (this is the species we are trying to attract with this box). Wood ducks are especially secretive and easily disturbed, so we take special precautions not to walk in this area during nesting.						
3 Larger COME box on river (2025 is first season)	None (would need to watch from across the river but this is Ft Steele Heritage area)	Yes	Unknown	No	COME COGO	Not used for a nest
Large depression in shavings, like a big duck sat there.						

### McGinty

Box #	Monitor	Used by a CNS	If Yes what species	Cavity nesting species seen going in and out	Cavity nesting species seen in the area	Result
1	Karen and Hilary	Yes	NOFL	No	BUFF BAGO	Not Used for a nest
BAGO seen mating in front of box 1 on March 27 June 12 Theckla saw immature BUFF swimming with lone female near box 1 A NOFL, left feathers but did not nest						
2	Theckla	No ?	NA	No	BUFF BAGO WODU COGO	Not Used for a nest

Something moved shavings but did not nest. We do not know what caused this.

Dates to be aware of:

- May-Nov when female Barrows and Common goldeneyes both have dark bills making them extra difficult to identify.
- First sighting of a BAGO using a box was on April 12, 2022 (Jan H. Box #1)
- First sighting of BAGO with young on E lake (using ebird) June 10, 2022 (Wendy H.)
- First sighting of BAGO with young on Sylvan Lake, Community Forest on e-bird May 28, 2025.
- First sighting of BUFF ducklings at McGinty Lake June 12, 2025 by Theckla.

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 2025**

**Respectfully submitted by: Stewart Wilson**

This was the fourth year of our Elizabeth Lake Ecosystem Enhancement Project. Following the annual inventory of native plants, more native plants were ordered and planted in those fenced native plant beds identified with the greatest need. Vole guards were placed around many plants for protection to prevent any further damage following a wet spring.

Chief Joe Pierre spoke at Turtle Day on April 22, which was well attended by approximately 500 members of the public. Six classes from three local elementary schools (150 students) participated in turtle-related activities in the morning.

Migratory Bird Day in May was a new venture for our club with various activities including a chance to go on a birding walk in the morning and afternoon with experienced birders. It is hoped that this will prove to be a popular annual event.

As part of BCGEU Volunteer Work Week (June), 30 employees with the BC Ministry of LWRS (Land, Water and Resource Stewardship) spent a morning removing barbed wire fencing on the slope below Parkland Middle School, as well as removing the wooden dock. Wood from the dock was used to reinforce the foundation of the nearby wooden bird hide, which was repainted in the late summer.

Theckla Sawicki was featured in a promotional video for Cranbrook Tourism about our Turtle Monitoring Project at Elizabeth Lake. It has been viewed 475,000 times since August on Instagram at: <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DN5zFvjYhX/>

Our July bi-monthly meeting was held at Elizabeth Lake with guest speakers from EKISC (East Kootenay Invasive Weed Council), who also led us on a walk to identify invasive species.

The Elizabeth Lake Committee supported having 10 Turtle Basking Logs designed and installed by Keefer Ecological Services using some of the funds from Columbia Basin Trust. The weather on the day in late October was cold and wet, and hundreds of waterfowl had gathered on the lake prior to migration by that time, so the installation of turtle logs has been postponed till April, 2026.

In late November three areas which had been sprayed during the summer for knapweed by EKISC were prepared, then seeded using a special local mixture of grass seed.

Elizabeth Lake continues to be the top Hot Spot (eBird) for the East Kootenays with 159 species this year.

Many thanks to all those members who volunteered their time helping with various activities at Elizabeth Lake during 2025!

## **BC Nature Report 2025**

**Respectfully submitted by: Stewart Wilson**

BC Nature continues:

*To provide naturalists and nature clubs of BC with a collective voice on conservation and environmental issues.*

*To foster an awareness, appreciation and understanding of our natural environment, that it may be wisely used and maintained for future generations.*

*To encourage the formation and cooperation of nature clubs throughout BC.*

*To provide a means of communication among naturalists in BC.*

The section on the BC Nature website on Advocacy for Nature Correspondence lists some of the work done by the Conservation Committee and Board of Directors in promoting conservation in nature with the various levels of government – federal, provincial, municipal, and indigenous.

<https://bcnature.org/letters-briefs/>

BC Nature's statement on the Federal Budget (2025) makes interesting reading:  
<https://bcnature.org/bc-nature-statement-federal-budget-2025/>

2025 has been a challenging year for BC Nature. Several funding applications were unsuccessful, and, as a result, the Board of Directors made an appeal to the general membership for donations to keep us in the black, which resulted in much needed income. Several cost-cutting measures were introduced including not replacing the Executive Director.

BCN's Membership fee has gone up from \$16.00 (where it has been for the past 10 years) to \$18.00 for 2026. The Rocky Mountain Naturalists Club has been charging \$25.00 for a single, and \$30.00 for a family. For those who want the four hard copies of BC Nature magazine, it costs an additional \$5.00.

An intern, funded by the Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions (PICS) and working with BC Nature, produced a digital handbook - Adapting Together: A Handbook for Climate Resilience in BC, which is available on our RMN website under Other Websites of Interest:

<https://bcnature.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Climate-Adaptation-and-NbS-Solutions-Digital-Handbook-BC-Nature-Edition-2.pdf>

## **Kootenay Conservation Program 2024** **Respectfully submitted by: Helga Knot**

I participated in the KCP Winter Webinar Series, Season 9, from January 16th through February 27th, 2025. There were four webinars over the course of the winter, presented on Thursday afternoons.

Columbia Mountain Institute of Applied Ecology (CREDtalks) and Kootenay Conservation Program (KCP) collaborated to organize and present the series, which was called Stewarding for Biodiversity.

Webinars included the following titles:

- Bunchgrass and Badgers in BC (January 16)
- Key Biodiversity Areas in the Kootenay-Columbia: Sites of
- Unique Biodiversity (January 30)
- Bonanza Biodiversity Corridor: Crafting a Conservation Roadmap (February 13)
- Code-switch – Translating Stewardship Practice across Cultures (February 27)

All the 2025 webinars, and those from previous years, have been recorded and can be found at: <https://kootenayconservation.ca/winter-webinar-series-recordings/>

## **2025 RMN Year-end Report**

**Respectfully submitted by: Dianne Cooper**

### **Weebly RMN Website Forms going to Emails:**

**Christmas Bird Counts - [sw.ek.cbc@gmail.com](mailto:sw.ek.cbc@gmail.com)**

**RMN Checklists & Products - [caldernahm@gmail.com](mailto:caldernahm@gmail.com)**

**RMN Calendar - [gprogers@telus.net](mailto:gprogers@telus.net)**

**Join RMN - [rmnmembership@gmail.com](mailto:rmnmembership@gmail.com)**

### **Access to site / contributors:**

**Dianne C., Paula R., Susan W., Jackie Diveky-Wells**

### **RMN internet presence:**

#### **Website on Weebly:**

There have been no major developments on our webpage at [Rocky Mountain Naturalists - RMN Home](#)

Please see last year's report for details on administration roles.

### **Facebook:**

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

Our private Facebook group now has 340 members (303 in 2024, 280 in 2023, 250 in 2022) with 45 new members this year.

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

### **Skookumchuck Prairie Key Biodiversity Area:**

Skookumchuck Prairie KBA is located between Wasa Lake and Skookumchuck on both sides of the Kootenay River. It is probably the most diverse area for birds in our area because of the mix of habitats. 232 species of bird have been recorded in the KBA as shown on eBird at:

## [Skookumchuck Prairie Bar Chart - eBird - to 2025](#)

### iNaturalist:

Observations of all plants and animals within the KBA now stands at 5,057 (4,061 in 2024) with 833 species recorded by 808 identifiers (people). There were 82 species of bird recorded on iNaturalist for Skookumchuck Prairie KBA

### [Skookumchuck Prairie Observations · iNaturalist](#)

### Solar farm threat:

The latest (autumn 2023) crown land application for developing a solar farm on Skookumchuck Prairie has been **"Abandoned"** according to the Gov't of BC Crown Land webpage: Applications, Comments & Reasons for Decisions. The Regional District of East Kootenay did not support this application. ([eSCRIBE Minutes](#)). Read more about the history of this issue and our actions to support Skookumchuck Prairie KBA on our website at [Action Alert Communiqué 2023 - Rocky Mountain Naturalists](#)

We had much support against this development from individuals and local, provincial, and national groups including hunters, ranchers, grassland conservation societies, and wildlife and nature conservation societies. We thank them all for submitting comments to the Government of British Columbia on this issue and hope this alliance can remain diligent to watch for and help waylay future threats.

### Research on the Prairie:

Birds Canada was in the area testing the use of a drone equipped with a thermal camera to locate Long-billed Curlew nests. They did not have much success in finding nests but they did participate in several local wildlife events including Elizabeth Lake Migratory Bird Day, Wings Over the Rockies, and the Creston Valley Wildlife Festival. We are grateful for their expertise, sharing of their knowledge, and overall support for the KBA.

### KBA Count

Birds Canada and the RMN sponsored the first ever official "KBA Bird Count" using a new method developed by Birds Canada and eBird. It is similar to a Christmas Bird Count in that teams were assigned a specific area to cover but it is different in that the effort data uses the standard eBird checklist protocols: Incidental, Stationary, and Travelling.

I wrote an article about the KBA count and it was published in the August issue of the "Tri-village Buzz" – the community newsletter for Wasa, Ta Ta Creek and Skookumchuck [TVB-08-2025.pdf](#)

The count by 20 people turned up a terrific 117 species – on par with the RMN "Little Big Day" - including some sweet ones like Hudsonian Whimbrel,

Caspian Tern, and Rock Wren; and of course, 19 Long-billed Curlew and 16 Lewis's Woodpecker, the two species-at-risk for which Skookumchuck Prairie KBA is famous. See the list at the following link:

[Skookumchuck Prairie KBA Count - eBird Trip Report](#)

#### Field trips:

I made 10 trips to various parts of the KBA in 2025 including a field trip for Wings Over the Rockies with co-leader Randy Harris. Randy knows all about the habitat restoration on the Prairie and is great at explaining the many nuances of grassland restoration. I recommend every RMN member go on this annual field trip to learn this important knowledge from Randy. I did not do much Lewis's Woodpecker nest monitoring this year so have no updates on number of nests.

#### **Christmas Bird Counts – Jaffray, Cranbrook and Kimberley:**

This will be our 28<sup>th</sup> official Christmas Bird Count (CBC) for Cranbrook and Kimberley and the fifth for Jaffray-Wardner. Marianne is organizing Jaffray-Wardner and Cranbrook and Carol F will organize Kimberley (Jan 2026). Jo Ellen and I will do the data entry for Jaffray-Wardner and I will do Cranbrook and Kimberley. See year-end reports by Marianne (and Carol) and summaries posted on our website.

#### **East Kootenay Bird Checklist:**

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

This involved updating the taxonomy of bird species and formatting for printing.

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

We now have 335 species on our checklist (not all are recorded on eBird). We added six new species this year: Red-throated Loon (seen in 2024, Lake Koochanusa, H. Diakow), Little Blue Heron (1 – Wardner, Jim H.), Ruff (1 – Irrigation Reservoir, Dianne C., Hudsonian Godwit (Elkford, L. Summerfeld), Parasitic Jaeger (Fairmon Meadows, M. Storey, and Hudsonian Whimbrel (Irrigation Reservoir, B. Dailey).

#### **eBird Review:**

<https://ebird.org/about>

I have retired as primary reviewer of eBird records for the Regional District of East Kootenay. This is now being done by Gary Davidson of Nakusp who is also a reviewer for Central Kootenay and other regions of BC. I will fill in for Gary as he requests. I contacted one of the Hotspot reviewers for eBird and we corrected several of our hotspots that had errors in names or locations.

Rocky Mountain Naturalists