

NEWSPACKET

M A Y - J U N E 2 0 2 0



A secretive bird of freshwater marshes, the Virginia Rail often remains hidden in dense vegetation, but its loud grunting may give away its presence. As it slowly pokes its way through the marsh, you might get a glimpse of its reddish bill, black-and-white barred sides, and its twitching tail, showing off white tail feathers beneath. It possesses many adaptations for moving through its nearly impenetrable habitat, including a laterally compressed body, long toes, and flexible vertebrae. The forehead feathers of Virginia Rails are adapted to withstand wear and tear that results from pushing through dense and often sharp marsh vegetation. As a group, rails have the highest ratio of leg muscles to flight muscles of any bird, which may explain their propensity to walk rather than fly.

www.allaboutbirds.org

photograph by Kenn Whyte, NONC member in Enderby

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Birds of the North Okanagan Part 7: 29 Feb. - 22 Apr., 2020

by Chris Siddle

All sightings, unless otherwise noted, were made by the author. Sightings of usual or rare birds require documentation in the form of carefully written physical descriptions of the birds or (preferably) photographs. Send your sightings directly to chris.siddle@gmail.com or enter them in the online program ebird.

THE first six days of March were comparatively warm in the lowlands with the deep snow cover gradually melting. Snow fell on the mornings of 7th and 8th March. A minor cold snap 13-16 March re-froze thawing pond edges. The remainder of March and the first three weeks of April were largely without snowfall in the valley bottom, resulting in a dry early spring. Snow melt from the surrounding hills caused flooding of farm fields along Otter Lake Road between Armstrong and Okeefe Ranch. Swan Lake was ice-free on 1 April. Ponds were generally ice-free by 7 April with the exception of Tompson

Pond. Generally the early spring was warm and quite dry.

Many thanks to all the North Okanagan Naturalists and friends who contributed their sightings to me personally or through their use of the ebird program. A special thanks goes out to the dedicated volunteers who patrol, maintain, and record results of NONC's bluebird nest boxes.

Ducks, Geese and Swans

A single adult Greater White-fronted Goose was resting with gulls on the sand bars at Okanagan Landing 11 March. Three migrant Greater White-fronts showed at Otter Lake, their usual temporary stopping site, 17 March (Claire Christensen). Canada Geese were noted migrating through or at least into the North Okanagan the week of 7-14 March. Harold Sellers got the earliest high Trumpeter Swan count with 130 at the marsh at the north end of Otter Lake at 7 March. This count fits well with the 128 I counted there 13 March. These numbers increased when it was discovered that hordes of swans, Canada Geese, Northern Pintails, and American Wigeon

were feeding in fields along Grandview Flats Road about a km west of Otter Lake. There on 29 March an estimated 210 Trumpeters and a few Tundras fed and rested, their only disturbance a Golden Eagle that plummeted into the flock but missed his intended prey, a Canada Goose.

LEFT: These are among the last of the 200+ Trumpeter Swans that accumulated in March and April around the marsh at Otter Lake seen here flying through a snow flurry 3 April.



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Birds of the North Okanagan continued

The first Wood Duck of the spring was on Deep Creek at O'Keefe Ranch 18 March (Jack VanDyk).

The earliest Eurasian Wigeon was on Vernon Bay 1 March. After the first few wigeons trickled into the N. Ok. American Wigeons arrived in numbers during the week of 7-13 March. The field n. of Swan Lake Nature Reserve Park where up to 300 American Wigeons grazed was a good site for spotting Eurasians. The highest count was of five drake Eurasian Wigeons 5 April. Single Eurasian drakes were detected through the period, including one at Dure Meadows Road 23 April (Scott Thompson). Northern Pintails followed an earlier pattern of arrival than did the American Wigeons. Sixty-eight at Otter Lake 29 February were their earliest appreciable concentration. On 10 March an estimated 1,100 pintails were crowding the seepage pond at Swan Lake NR Park (John Woods), and on 30 March at least 2,000 were along Grandview Flats Road just west of Otter Lake.

American Green-winged Teals were numerous in the Deep Creek flooded fields north of Otter Lake Cross Road. On 27 March a survey involving counts from photos revealed an estimated 465 American Green-wings in less than one kilometer. A Eurasian Green-winged Teal (considered a subspecies of Green-winged Teal by the American Ornithological Society

but considered a separate species called Common Teal by the British authorities and most everyone else) was photographed at Otter Lake 3 April, a first for the N. Okanagan.



ABOVE: Part of a huge flock of American Wigeon at Otter Lake marsh 1 April 2020. Look for the Eurasian Wigeon X American Wigeon hybrid (top centre), standing out with a partially red brown face and buffy lower half to its face. A broad green eyepatch curves away from the eye. Also look for the drake American Wigeon with the unusually white lower face. This is a fairly common plumage variant among male American Wigeons. Jack and I learned in March that such variants are sometimes called "Storm Wigeons" by waterfowl hunters.

The first Canvasback of the spring was a lone male on 3 Mar. at the marsh, n. end of Otter Lake. This
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Birds of the North Okanagan continued

bird was replaced by a lone female-type on 7 March in the company of 3 drake Ring-necked Ducks. The largest concentration this spring was of a paltry 24 on the Westside km 0.5 Pond 3 April. That count, in turn, pales compared to the 128 counted on the same pond back on 19 March 2015.

A drake Red-breasted Merganser was among Common Mergansers on Swan Lake 5 April. Red-breasts are among a set of rare to uncommon waterfowl visitors to the N. Okanagan that appear annually, mostly during the often huge assemblies of Common Mergansers on Swan Lake in autumn.

Pheasants, Grouse and Allies

Scott Thompson's dog, Chester, flushed four Gray Partridge near Wye Lake high on the Goose Lake Range where Scott had band member permission to hike on 11 April. On 4 April Scott had heard a bird calling in the morning near the south end of Goose Lake. Clearly a remnant population of this introduced game bird hangs on in the North Okanagan.

A Dusky Grouse was seen eating grit on Cathedral Drive at Silver Star Village 13 April, providing one of very few spring records for the North Okanagan.

Grebes

Margaret MacKenzie reports that 30 Western Grebes were back on Head of the Lake Arm of Okanagan Lake when she returned to the lakehouse 11 April.

Hummingbirds

The earliest Calliope Hummingbird report was of a male at Jack VanDyk's home on Pottery Road 16 April. Rufous Hummingbirds became evident generally in the N. Okanagan very soon thereafter.

Rails and Coots

The first American Coots to leave Okanagan Lake and appear at the Otter Lake marsh were three on 7 March. By mid-April between 50 and 100 could be found at the same site, likely awaiting a decrease in high water levels before breeding. With increased flooding on 23 April, they will have a while to wait.

Cranes

Tom Seifert's sighting of a single Sandhill Crane n. of Otter Lake Cross Road 4 April was the first spring record. On 12 April Ted Hillary saw 21 flying w. of Enderby.

Plovers

The season's first Killdeer was seen at the East Vernon Rd. horse ranch fields-marsh 2 March (R. Tammi). This was followed by two at the same place next day as well as one along L and A Cross Road. Thereafter the species was uncommon but widespread.

Sandpipers and Allies

A Long-billed Curlew was heard at Otter Lake 7 April. One was seen in a wet field s. of Enderby 12 Apr. (Ted Hillary). Greater Yellowlegs were on schedule, arriving in the first week of April. Single Lesser Yellowlegs began to be reported shortly after mid-April.

Gulls and Terns

First flocks of migrating Ring-billed Gulls noted about 7 March (Larkin Cross Rd.) Two adult Mew Gulls were spotted this spring with one at Okanagan Landing and the other along Larkin Cross Road 21 March. The first of the spring Bonaparte's Gulls (2), passage migrants, appeared on Swan Lake 21 April.

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Birds of the North Okanagan continued

Hérons, Egrets and Bitterns

After a mostly heron-less winter, Great Blue Herons were slow to return to the North Okanagan. The first ebird record was of a single over Swan Lake N.R.P. 22 Feb. A flurry of four adults appeared unexpectedly (for the site) at frozen Cools Pond 3 March representing the first arriving spring birds for the region. 1-4 herons were detected at that site for most of the rest of March. At this time a reliable count of adults at the 24th St. colony is not available.



medium sized downies on their nest on Vernon Hill 22 April.

New World Vultures

The earliest Turkey Vultures were three sharing a snag at Otter Lake 27 March.

Hawks, Eagles and Kites

The spring's first Swainson's Hawk was an intermediate/dark morph bird (as are most Swainson's adults are in the N. Okanagan) along Otter Lake Road 10 April. This bird was slightly earlier than usual. By the third week of April Swainson's Hawks were evident at Silver Star-L and A Road junction; Old Kamloops Road, Baker-Hogg Road, Otter Lake Cross Road, and a few other locations.

Owls

Of note was a Western Screech Owl at an undisclosed location, Lavington-Lumby, sheltering in a shed 26 March (Scott Thompson). Claire Rioux filmed a Great Horned Owl parent with three

ABOVE: At least four herons visited Cools Pond in March and April. For unknown reasons, this Great Blue Heron, which is normally a flighty bird not allowing close approach, landed right in front of me and allowed this portrait 11 April.

Swallows

A very early Cliff Swallow appeared with numerous Violet-green Swallows over the beach at Paddlewheel Park 4 April.

Kinglets

A silent Ruby-crowned Kinglet and a Pacific Wren at Polson Park 5 March were probably overwintering birds as this wooded park seems to attract half-hardy winterers perhaps because of a slightly warmer micro-climate. A Pacific Wren was heard in song in the woods upstream from the BX Dog Park 12 March.

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*Birds of the North Okanagan continued***Thrushes and Allies**

The first egg of the spring was found in a nest box occupied by Western Bluebirds along the Vernon Hill bluebird trail 22 April (Claude Rioux). A flock of 21-26 Mountain Bluebirds frequented Swan Lake NR Park (Laurel Macdonald; Jack Van Dyk). Varied Thrushes began to appear in valley bottom locations the week of 7-14 March as they quietly migrated into higher, damper and shadier habitats in the surrounding mountains.

Finches and Allies

A male Common Redpoll was at 6131 Silver Star Rd. 15 March. Up to three were reported from an East Hill feeder in early March (Pat McAllister). Evening Grosbeaks continued to be slightly more common than usual. Twelve were at Scott Thompson's yard along Whitevale Rd. near Lumby 26 March. Thirty Gray-crowned Rosy Finches at Harper Road near Lumby 11 March were rare spring visitors (Scott Thompson).

Longspurs and Snow Buntings

Snow Buntings were briefly more conspicuous than usual, as they moved through the Okanagan Valley. The largest flock reported was of 22 at Swan Lake Nature Reserve Park 11 March. A single was seen on Middleton Mountain on 18 April (Rick Bonar). Perhaps the heavy snow cover higher in the hills forced the birds to the bottomlands.

New World Sparrows

A silent Savannah Sparrow at Swan Lake Nature Reserve Park 31 March was two-three weeks ahead of schedule. The next two Savannahs were spotted 20 April (Scott Thompson). A Harris's Sparrow, a rare but probably annual spring migrant appeared with White-crowned Sparrows at Scott Thompson's

yard near Lumby 22 April. Jack VanDyk photographed the N. Okanagan's first Lincoln's Sparrow of the spring at his home along Pottery Rd. 22 April.

Blackbirds and Allies

The first Western Meadowlarks of the year were recorded on Vernon Mountain 17 March (Margaret MacKenzie).

New World Warblers

A very early male Yellow-rumped (Audubon's) Warbler in open Ponderosa Pine woods at Adventure Bay 6 March. The earliest Nashville Warbler of the spring was singing along Hitchcock Road 20 April. 🌍



Global Big Day is an annual celebration of the birds around you, and this year is no different. While not everyone may be able to leave home to bird this year, Global Big Day is still an opportunity to check in with the birds in and around where you live. Join us on 9 May and be a part of a global birding community by sharing what birds you see around you with eBird. <https://ebird.org> Participating is easy. Wherever you are, you can be a part of the global community of birders on 9 May. If you can spare at least 5 or 10 minutes, report your observations to eBird online or with our free eBird Mobile app. If you have more time, submit checklists of birds throughout the day at different times.

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ASTER OR FLEABANE?

by Margaret MacKenzie

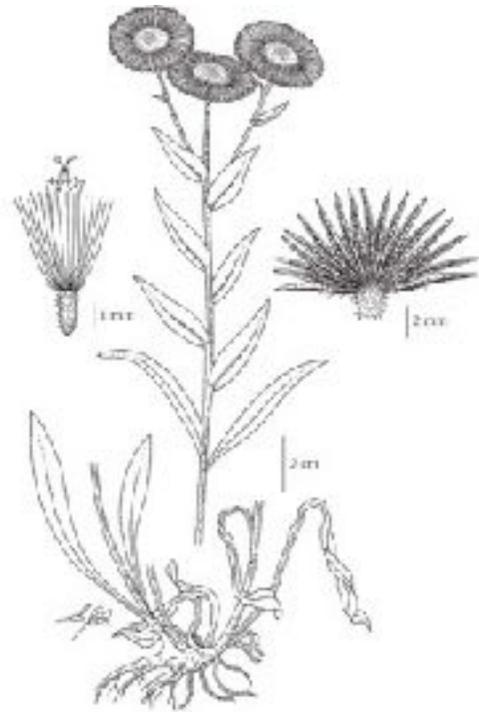
Erigeron peregrinus, commonly known as Subalpine Daisy or Subalpine Fleabane, is one of my favourite summer wildflowers found blooming in mountain meadows. You can see these large pretty pink daisies on the slopes of Silver Star Mountain, or almost anywhere in the subalpine mountain meadows of BC.



Erigeron peregrinus - Subalpine Daisy

I'm sometimes asked what is the difference between fleabanes (also called daisies) and asters? Both are daisy-like in appearance and most are white, pink, purplish or blue in colour. It's actually quite simple to distinguish the two genera of *Erigeron* and *Aster*,

as it has to do with their bracts. The involucre under the flower head consists of leaf-like bracts. The bracts of fleabanes are all the same length. The bracts underneath an aster are uneven in length or what they call shingled. Only the Subalpine Fleabane can fool you because the bracts are curled back giving a shingled appearance. However, if you flatten out those bracts with your hand you will see they are all the same length.



Erigeron speciosus var. *speciosus*

above: *Showy Daisy*

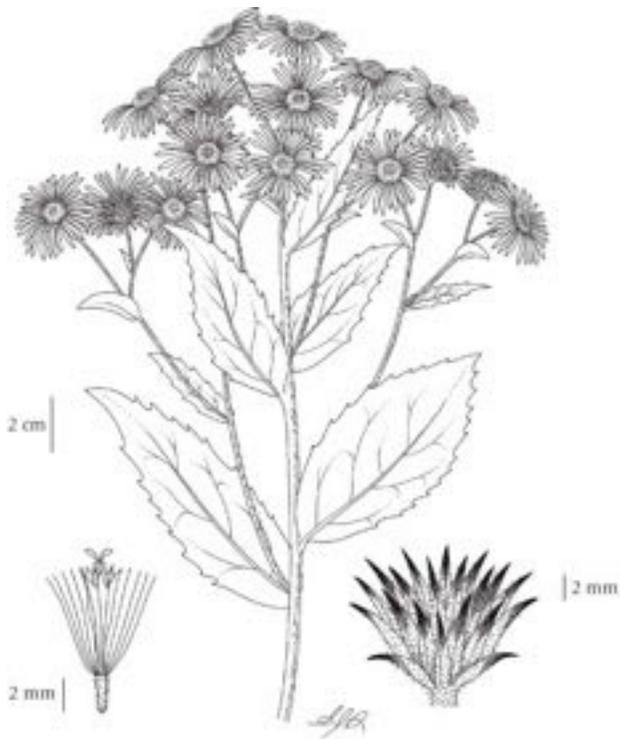
How many ray petals on a flower head also helps to distinguish the two genera. Fleabanes have up to 150 ray petals per flower head whereas asters are sparsely petalled having from 12 to 60 ray petals.

Finally, a general rule of thumb is that the fleabanes usually bloom first whereas the asters bloom later. Here in the lower Vernon hills we see our first asters
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Aster or Fleabane continued

fleabanes (Cut-leaf Daisy) blooming in April and asters beginning in late June and blooming through to September. Common fleabanes found in our area are Cut-leaf Daisy, Fine-leaved Daisy (a yellow flowering fleabane!), Philadelphia Fleabane and Spreading Fleabane.



Aster conspicuus

above: Showy Aster

A very pretty showy fleabane that blooms in our open grassland forests in May is *Erigeron speciosus* or Showy Fleabane. The name *speciosus* means pretty. The entire plant can be as tall as 18 inches (45cm) with a large flower head and many blue petals with yellow disc flowers. All the Fleabanes can be differentiated one from another without much difficulty using a plant book such as “*Plants of the*

Southern Interior British Columbia” by Parish, Coupe and Lloyd.

Although asters are fairly easy to distinguish from the fleabanes they are not easy to identify from each other. It takes persistence and close study to determine which aster you have come across. One common aster found in our lower foothills and forest openings in July is *Aster conspicuus* (*Eurybia conspicua*) or Showy Aster. It can grow in height to 100 cm, has large entire rough basal leaves becoming smaller up the stem, and sparse numbers of blue ray flowers (12 -16). Like other asters, if you look under the flower head at the bracts, you will see they are shingled and uneven in length.



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Aster or Fleabane continued

- 4. *Plants of Southern Interior British Columbia* - Parish, Coupe, Lloyd
- 5. *Vascular Plants of the Pacific Northwest* - Hitchcock, Cronquist, Ownbey and Thompson



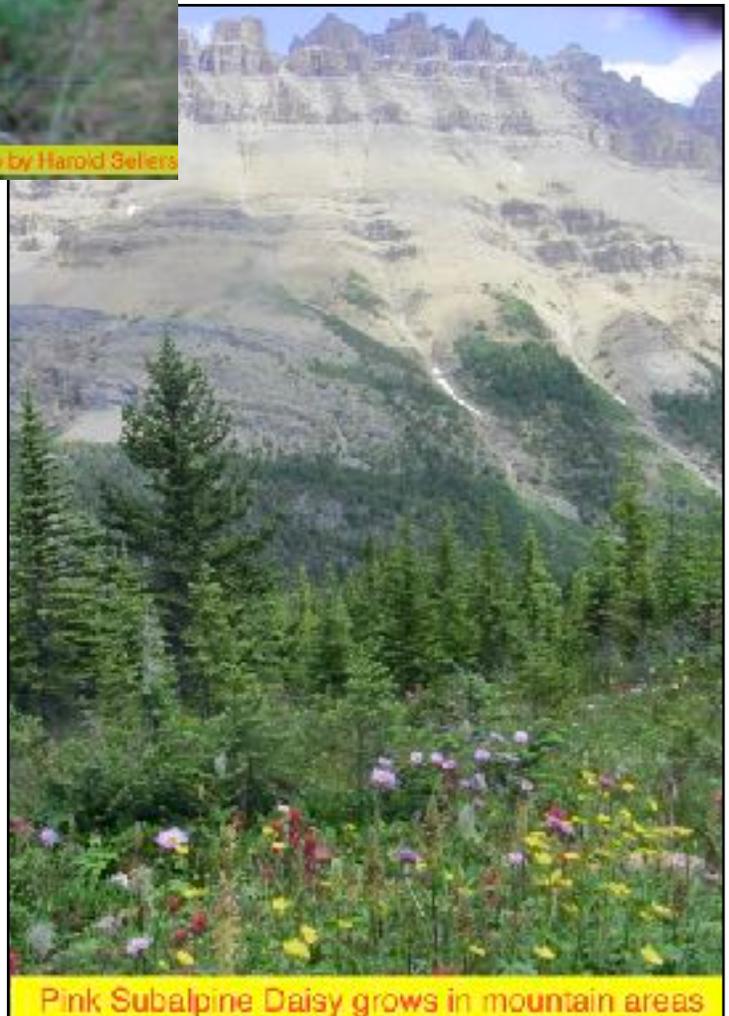
The name fleabane appears to be derived from a belief that the dried plants repelled fleas or that the plants were poisonous to fleas. — Wikipedia

In our hills and mountain areas there are several asters that confound you with their identity. *Aster englemannii* (now *Eucephalus englemannii*) or Englemann's Aster, *Aster subspicatum* (*Symphyotrichum subspicatum*) or Douglas's Aster, *Aster foliaceus* (*Symphyotrichum foliaceum*) or Leafy Aster, *Aster modestus*, (*Canadanthus modestus*).....there are more!

Most of us are content to list "Aster" at the end of the day. But if you can separate the *Erigerons* like *Erigeron peregrinus* and *Erigeron compositus* from the *Asters* and then use the book identification guides to sort the other asters, you will soon be able to tell them apart.

References:

1. The BC Government Taxonomy Website
2. EFlora Website
3. *Illustrated Flora of British Columbia* - Douglas, Meidinger, Pojar



Pink Subalpine Daisy grows in mountain areas

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Hummingbird Banding Program 2020

by Gail Loughridge

HUMMINGBIRD migration is on its way and we have had reports of hummingbirds at various sites around the area. I am keeping a tally of hummingbirds in the area and if you wish to add your numbers and species, please email me at kalliope@shaw.ca. I would welcome all contributions.

The Canadian Bird Banding office is advising everyone to respect human health and safety for everyone. Therefore, like everyone else in the North Okanagan, we will practice social distancing and we are not going to band hummingbirds as a group for the present. However, one of our three banding sites will be active this week (May 1st) on a limited basis. We are not sure what it will look like yet but hopefully there will be a few hummingbirds banded.



above: female Rufous

One of our other sites has had to take their hummingbird feeders down because of bears in the yard. And, our third site, which is off of Westside Rd., has been declared off limits to summer living as it is on Band land. We are hoping to ease into more banding as the spring progresses but still on a limited volunteer basis. Most of us are 'champing at the bit' to catch and band those little critters. But...

We have a great and dedicated group of volunteers and we all hope to get out to our sites sometime this year. And we hope to be able to resume a normal banding season next year with all the volunteers.



photo above: female Calliope

The hummingbird banding program is a thriving entity in British Columbia. We have eight sites that are monitored annually. The data from all these sites is all processed in Victoria and sent to the Canadian Wildlife Association. Some of the sites are also sending their data to the Hummingbird Monitoring Network in Arizona. This is a separate organization that is monitoring hummingbird numbers and health.

Hummingbirds seem to be thriving in the North Okanagan again this year. I have just received a video of a female Rufous Hummingbird remaking her nest from last year. Hallelujah!

They are just wonderful creatures to watch and enjoy! 🌍

[Hummingbird Monitoring Network](#) (HMN) - University of Arizona, Arizona, USA
Click on link to visit this website.

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^ Okanagan Collaborative Conservation Program

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Newspacket is published five times per year, in January-February, March-April, May-June, September-October and November-December.

Thank you to Wayside Press of Vernon which prints our hard copies of Newspacket.

Copy for publication should be sent to Harold Sellers, Editor, by e-mail hikerharold@gmail.com.



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North Okanagan
Naturalists Club

MONTHLY MEETINGS

On the first Wednesday of the month (September through May), we hold a meeting for members and visitors at the Schubert Centre (starting in May). Start time, 7:00 pm. Guest speakers, club news, refreshments.

NONC MEMBERSHIP

Clip or copy this form to begin or renew a membership with the North Okanagan Naturalists' Club. The form is also available on our website. Annual dues are \$35 for an individual and \$50 for a couple or family. Every member should also complete a Waiver form, available at our website membership page.

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