

Founding and history of the North Okanagan Naturalists' Club (NONC)

Our Club came into being in 1951 due to the foresight of the late Dr. Douglas Ross, who was the head of the Federal Forest Insect Laboratory, then located in Vernon. Dr. Ross had attended a work-related conference in Ottawa where he also took the opportunity to attend a meeting of the local natural history society. He was so impressed with what he saw and heard that he came home enthused to start a similar club in Vernon. He also returned with a copy of the constitution and bylaws of the Ottawa club.

With the help of several like-minded individuals Dr. Ross called a few informal meetings in his home before advertising a founding meeting. Minutes were taken and the North Okanagan Naturalists Association (Club) was formed and an executive was elected from the membership. Members are referred to as Noncers (pronounced 'nonkers'). Dr. Ross became the first club president and Phil Jones was secretary-treasurer. In later years Phil, who retired to Vernon after a distinguished career as a 'forest bug man' in the United States, related an interesting story. Dr. Ross had instructed him as a young student scientist and employee, to attend the founding meeting where he would be asked to take the minutes. He did, and became club secretary!

Over the years one club member held an executive position longer than any member and that person was the late Kay Bartholomew. Kay was the strong link who devoted many hours and much energy to keeping the club vibrant, with a full range of activities and regular events. Kay died in 2018 in her 98th year.

NONC has had a proud history in the North Okanagan and for years had around 200 members or more. Yearly activities included summer camps in many regions of the province and beyond, a spring field day in May followed by a dinner and keynote speaker. Weekly walks and hikes lead by experienced naturalists were and still are regular activities, as are the monthly membership meetings held the first Wednesday of each month from January to May and then from September to December. The December meeting used to be a major social event with a sit-down hot dinner planned and prepared by club members. It was not unusual for 175 members and guests to sign up for the early Christmas dinner. Our membership has fluctuated in recent years but we are proud to say that the number has stabilized at around 120 to 125 in the last two years.

Our club and its members have been strong advocates for the natural world and its preservation. The creation of the Swan Lake Nature Reserve just north of Vernon is due in part to NONC and its members. Our club participates in the bluebird nest box monitoring program and reports the annual results of fledglings. There is also a hummingbird banding program under a licensed bander who is a club member. Several club members, past and present, were and still are eco-reserve wardens who help to protect the flora and fauna of unique ecosystems in the North Okanagan, Shuswap and Monashee regions.

Club members coordinate the annual Christmas Bird Count in December and the Swan and Eagle Count in early January each year.

NONC is an affiliate member of the Federation of B.C. Naturalists. This provincial organization is more commonly known as BC Nature. Our club was one of the earlier members of BC Nature and we are proud of the fact we are incorporated as a not-for-profit under the B.C. Society Act in our own right. We will continue to advocate for nature and the preservation of parkland and open space. The motto of BC Nature is 'Know nature and keep it worth knowing'. This inspires our club, its members and others like us, to continue to be stewards of nature in a fragile environment on an unpredictable planet.

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