

NEWSPACKET

December 2023

Journal of the
North Okanagan
Naturalists' Club

Red-tailed Hawk
photographed
by Jack VanDyk



NONC

North Okanagan Naturalists' Club (NONC)

P.O. Box 473

Vernon, B.C. V1T 6M4

Email info@nonc.ca

Website www.nonc.ca



EXECUTIVE

President	Harold Sellers 250-307-3543
Vice-President	
Secretary	Rod Drennan 250-545-4999
Treasurer	Marnie Williamson 250-545-4743
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PROGRAMS & ACTIVITIES

Contact the following if you have questions.

BC Nature	Pam Jenkins 250-545-0490
Bluebird Trails	Margaret Mackenzie 250-542-2712
Botany	Margaret Mackenzie 250-542-2712
Christmas Bird Count	Don Cecile
Conservation	Harold Sellers 250-307-3543
Cools Pond	Rod Drennan 250-545-4999
Hummingbird Banding	Gail Loughridge 250-545-7455
Nature Walks	contact the club
Newsletter	Harold Sellers 250-307-3543
Speakers	Bruce Tattersall 778-874-4614
Swan Lake	Robert Hettler, Margaret MacKenzie, Chris Siddle, Marnie Williamson
Swan & Eagle Count	Norbert Maertens 250-503-8790 Rod Drennan 250-545-4999
Trips	contact the club
Website & Social Media	Harold Sellers 250-307-3543

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North Okanagan Birds : September 2023

by Chris Siddle

THE following sight records are of rare, scarce, or otherwise noteworthy bird species within the boundaries of North Okanagan as set by eBird. Observers include Margaret Mackenzie (MM); Laurel McDonald (LMc); Chris Siddle (CS); Scott Thomson (ST); Jack VanDyk (JVD).

Snow Goose – Uncommon but increasing autumn migrant. Sept. is quite early for migrant Snow Geese so of note were an adult at Otter Lake 11 and 16 Sept. (CS) and two adults were with Canada Geese at Goose L. 30 Sept. (CS).

Wood Duck – Uncommon and local summer resident in small numbers. Rare in winter. At an unusual location were two immatures at Cools Pond throughout Sept. (LMc CS).

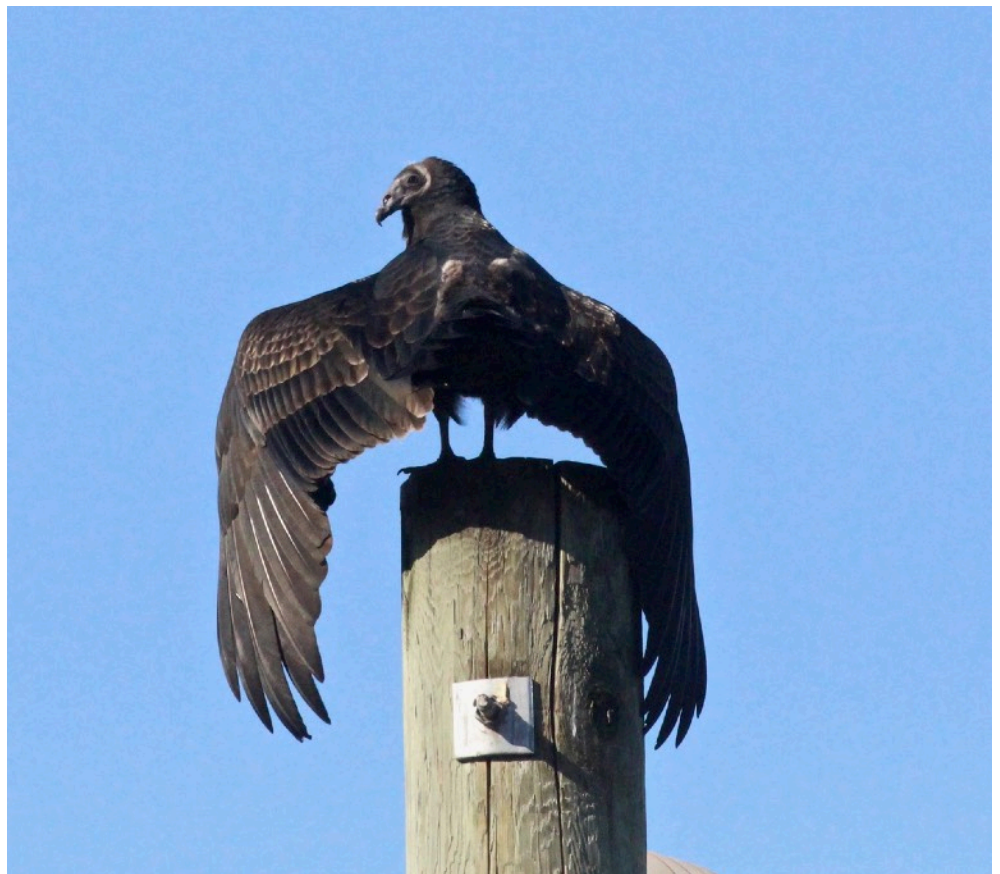
Lesser Scaup – Formerly a fairly common summer resident, Lesser Scaup numbers continue to plummet locally except at Rawlings Lake (ST; CS).

Pied-billed Grebe – Fairly common though local resident. Rose's Pond hosted a notable congregation of 16 PBGRs on 19 Sept. (CS).

Eared Grebe – Very local breeding summer resident. Rare elsewhere. The colony was

reproduced successfully at Rawlings Lake this summer despite low water levels (ST, CS).

Western Grebe – Uncommon migrant. Very local summer breeding resident. Although outside the time period, it's important to note that Margaret Mackenzie's kayak survey of the North Arm of Okanagan Lake in August found no chicks. At the Salmon Arm colony there was almost complete reproductive failure as well.



A juvenal Turkey Vulture literally hanging out near L and A Road, North BX, Vernon on 21 Sept. 2023. Photo by author

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September Birds continued

Sandhill Crane – Very small local summer resident and occasional migrant. mostly observed at Rawlings Lake with 8 on 13 Sept. (CS: ST) and 15 on 19 Sept (ST).

Black-bellied Plover – Rare migrant. 1 at the mouth of Vernon Ck. Sept. (JVD) was photographed.

American Golden-Plover – Rare migrant. A juvenile was at Otter L. marsh 1 Sept. (CS, ST).

Long-billed Dowitcher – Common but local migrant. A high count of 20 was made at Rawlings L. 21 Sept. (ST). Smaller numbers of LBDOs were to linger especially at Rawlings well into Nov.

Semipalmated Sandpiper – Normally common but local migrant. This year it was quite uncommon. Last fall record for 2023 was a single at Rawlings L. 2 Sept. (ST).

Gulls in general showed less diversity than usual with very few Bonaparte's Gull appearing. One was at Kalamalka Beach-Rotary Pier 15 Sept. (CS). American Herring Gulls finally appeared, in very low numbers, late in the month.

Double-crested Cormorant - increasing visitor. Best considered quite uncommon at this time. Usually absent in winter. Continue to show up in the N. Okanagan with Goose Lake being favoured this season with an adult 5 Sept. (CS) and an imm. 18 and 20 Sept. (CS).

American White Pelican – Quite uncommon migrant. A single stopped at Rawlings L. 2 Sept. (ST) and 21 at Goose L. 20 Sept. (L.Mc).

Black-backed Woodpecker (rare, local and irruptive resident). **American Three-toed Woodpecker** (uncommon resident). The base of Bluenose Mountain, near Lumby, remained a fairly reliable spot for Black-backed and American Three-toed Woodpeckers through the month (ST).

Peregrine Falcon (rare but possibly locally increasing migrant) - CS appeared to have the best luck seeing Peregrine Falcons this Sept. with an immature along Otter L. Road 5 Sept. and single immatures at Goose L. 18 and 20 Sept.

Flycatchers and Vireos put on a very poor showing throughout Sept. with migrant species of both mostly absent from the very few flocks of migrant passerines witnessed.

Clark's Nutcracker – Very local and declining resident. Occasionally irruptive. Has become very hard to find locally.

Steller's Jay – Uncommon to common resident. Irruptive? In early Sept. Steller's Jays began appearing much more frequently than they have in a decade along the forest-suburban interface around Vernon.

Horned Lark – Uncommon migrant. Rare in winter. Horned Larks had a reasonably good Sept. Rawlings Lake proved to be a favoured spot due to good habitat (exposed mud) at its east end and ST's ability to detect this species high pitched flight calls. A high count was of 47 at Rawlings L. 19 Sept. (ST).

Violet-green Swallow – common summer resident. As usual flocks were detected throughout Sept. and into the first days of Oct.

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September birds continued

Rock Wren – Uncommon very local resident. A juvenal showed up 23-24 Sept. in the middle of grasslands at the tiny rocky feature, Marmot City, along the nature trail at the Allan Brooks Nature Centre (LMc; CS). An interesting example of juvenal/immature dispersal

Marsh Wren – Common migrant. A high count of 29 Marsh Wrens was made 19 Sept. at Rawlings Lake (ST).

Mountain Bluebird – Uncommon summer resident. A flock of at least 15 Mountain Bluebirds could be seen on the grassland just east of Rose's Pond 29 Sept. (CS).

Finches in general were scarce.

Purple Finch – rare visitor. An adult male Purple Finch at Otter Lake 1 Sept. was a surprise, seldom seen at any time of year in the Okanagan (CS).

Chipping Sparrow - Common summer resident. Up to 46 Chipping Sparrows were found in shrubs along Whitevale Road near its junction with Headgates Road (ST). First observed in early Sept., the Chippies lingered well into Oct. much later than usual at this location.

Golden-crowned Sparrow - Rare migrant. Two immatures were with a flock of White-crowned Sparrows near the Coldstream Cemetery 23 Sept. (CS).

Spotted Towhee – Common summer resident. Uncommon winter resident. Towhees are normally easily found in the N. Okanagan well into winter, but

this early autumn the species became very uncommon.

Western Meadowlark – Common though declining summer resident. Meadowlarks congregate into flocks in autumn but are seldom encountered after the species' brief resurgence of song in late summer. Of note, therefore, were at least 28 in a flock at the north end of St. Anne Road 9 Sept. (CS). 🌿

Interior Wild Life Rehabilitation Centre

<http://interiorwildlife.ca/>

IWRS is a non-profit organisation. We advocate for a peaceful co-existence of local communities and native wildlife.

Our facility in Summerland is government licensed to care for native small mammals and water birds. We are not open to the public to drop off animals directly- to protect hospitalized animals from stress while recovering. Our goal? Rehabilitate for release.

Learning and understanding are necessary for living with and conserving wild animals we share this beautiful valley with.

We strive to provide expert education for the public, our members and volunteers. How to be stewards for wildlife and keep our ecosystems healthy.

To provide valuable insight into the health of local populations, we collect data from animals treated at our facility whenever possible. 🌿



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After the Fires

**BC Ecologists say life will return to B.C. wildfire zone, but trees may never grow back
Smaller shrubs and animals like bluebirds, owls and woodpeckers likely to thrive as environment regenerates**

*Nono Shen · The Canadian Press
Sep 02, 2023 via www.cbc.ca/news
Illustration from The City of Kelowna*

THE charred hills surrounding Lake Okanagan in the B.C. Interior will likely look very different in a year's time and beyond as life returns to the wildfire-ravaged landscape, ecologists predict. An eruption of low plants, grasses, and shrubs will turn the hills green. Birds and small mammals, as well as deer and bears, will return to feast on berries and other plant life. Carnivores including cougars could move in.

But the tall trees destroyed by the fires may never recover or return, said Robert Gray, a wildland fire ecologist.

"When you look at West Kelowna, it's really rocky, steep ground and trees aren't going to come back very well there. There is not a lot of moisture in the soil and it's only going to get drier with climate change," said Gray. "A lot of that landscape may not see a lot of trees come back."

Gray said that by next June, people should expect to see "an explosion of shrubs, grasses, and herbs" sprouting from the ruined forest.

"What will happen on that landscape is you'll get a lot of shrubs. Grasses will come back and that's good for a while," said Gray.



"Nature is amazing. It's resilience ... there are so many plants that are adapted to fire. They need fire on a regular basis, so they will re-occupy those areas."

For instance, shrub species in the wildfire zone already had seeds deeply buried in the soil, and were waiting for heat or fire to germinate them, Gray said. Tree recovery is a different matter.

"Unless you intentionally plant these areas, they're not likely to have a lot of trees in the future," said Gray.

Okanagan residents are no strangers to catastrophic wildfires.

In 2003, the Okanagan Mountain Park fire forced the evacuation of thousands of people and destroyed hundreds of properties. It also transformed the landscape.

Tara Bergeson, an urban forestry supervisor with the City of Kelowna, said the 2003 fire that scorched the park and the city was "very severe and has had a lasting impact on the landbase."

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After the Fires continued

"Little regeneration has occurred in much of the area, and we may not see trees return in a timely way or at all. Currently, much of the area remains as shrubs and grassland," Bergeson wrote in an email.

Recently burned trees, weakened but clinging to life, can attract bark beetles and other insects, Gray said. "These little beetles, they'll burrow into the tree and they will lay their eggs, and when the young larvae grow they will basically kill the tree," said Gray. In about five to eight years, dead trees will start to break apart.

Gray said situations like these will pose significant fire risks, especially with ongoing climate change making things drier and hotter. He said prescribed burns would be important in such areas to limit future wildfires.

Some bird species thrive after wildfires

Ken Lertzman, professor emeritus at Simon Fraser University's school of resource and environmental management, said some small animals can thrive after fires, such as bluebirds, hawks, owls and woodpeckers.

"They can really take advantage of that particular mix of resources that are available in those very young, open forests," said Lertzman.

Gray agreed, saying recently burned, open forest ground with plenty of grasses and shrubs could be a food heaven for animals.

"Now it's open and there are grasses and herbs and shrubs and berries and nuts, there is so much to eat,"

said Gray. A diverse shrub community with berries would attract visitors including deer, elk and bears, and insects and birds would be drawn to flowers, added Gray.

Lertzman said the length of forest regeneration depends on many factors, ranging from soil conditions to temperatures.

Generally speaking, it took 40 to 60 years for young forests to get established and at least 100 years for mature forests to return, said Lertzman, adding that forests recovering from fire represented a natural cycle.



"In the B.C. Interior and lots of forests around the world, the forest fire is part of the evolutionary history of the forest," said Lertzman.

However, Gray said it would not necessarily be a bad thing if many trees did not come back.

"If we get the similar forest back, then it will just burn again," he said.

"On that landscape, you definitely want fewer trees because the more trees, you have more drought and then it weakens the trees and insects kill the trees," said Gray, "and then fire occurs, so we want fewer trees there." 🌱

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DECEMBER CALENDAR

MONTHLY MEETINGS

NONC monthly meetings are held in the Emerald Room at The Schubert Centre for Seniors, 30th Ave., in downtown Vernon. No entry fee. Members and non-members welcome. Coffee and cookies served!

NEXT MEETING: Wednesday, December 6th at 7:00 pm. Our guest speaker will be Bob France, an agrologist with the BC Cattlemen's Association. He will discuss grasslands, cattle grazing and bird habitats.

SATURDAY NATURE WALKS

Join us Saturdays at 9:00 am (8:00 in August). Visitors welcome. Dress for the weather. We do a lot of birdwatching, so bring binoculars if you have them. See list below.

DR 1 & 2 are generally suitable for almost anyone, of any age. However, if you have issues of mobility and/or stamina, you should speak to the leader before attempting.

DR 1 Easy — Suitable for most people. Mostly paved or good-surface path, fairly level with some gentle climbs.

DR 2 Moderate — Suitable for most walkers and hikers with no mobility or endurance issues. May have longer distance with steeper hills and switchbacks, some uneven and rough path.

December 2nd - 9am DR2

Join the North Okanagan Naturalists' Club for a Nature Walk along the Grey Canal from Blue Jay parking lot to Turtle Mountain and back. Take the

2023

DECEMBER

Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa	Su
				1	②	3
4	5	⑥	7	8	⑨	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	⑰
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

Merry Christmas!

Old Kamloops Road to Goose Lake Road then left on Blue Jay Rd to parking lot.
Contact Justin at justinoblak1624@hotmail.com

December 9th - 9am DR 2

Join the North Okanagan Naturalists' Club for a Nature Walk in Kalamalka Provincial Park from the Red Gate, through the park to the Water Tower and looping back on the Palfrey Road and pathway. Meet at the Red Gate on Kidston Road. Bring poles and wear ice grippers if snow or ice on trails.
Contact Susan at supepghat@hotmail.com

Sunday, December 17th — Christmas Bird Count.

If you wish to participate, contact Don Cecile <dcecile@shaw.ca>. Following the days count, later in the afternoon, we will have a count wrap-up event at The People's Place. Details to come in the weekly e-news.