

NEWSPACKET

Journal of the North Okanagan Naturalists' Club

May-June 2021



Western White Trilliums

Trillium ovatum

Shuswap River, near Cherryville

photo by Harold Sellers

NONC



North Okanagan Naturalists' Club (NONC)

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^ Okanagan Collaborative Conservation Program

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Birds of the North Okanagan, Part 13: 25 Feb. - 25 Apr. 2021

by Chris Siddle

Sightings of unusual or rare birds require documentation in the form of carefully written physical descriptions of the birds or preferably photography. Send your sightings directly to chris.siddle@gmail.com or enter them in the online birding program eBird.

Observers: Roger Beardmore (RB); Don Cecile (DC); Chris Charlesworth (CC); Claire Christensen (CC); Anne Clarke (AC); Gary Davidson (GD); Gail Loughridge (GL); Margaret Mackenzie (MM); Pat McAllister (PM); Laurel McDonald (LM); Claude Rioux (CR); Chris Siddle (CS); Scott Tompson (ST); Jack VanDyk (JVD); John Woods (JWo).

Weather: March was cool and windy with less than normal precipitation. April was very dry, with an unusually high number of clear, warm days.

Waterfowl

Snow Geese have increased as migrants through the Okanagan Valley over the past decade. This spring, so far, Snow Geese were few and far between with 1 at Otter Lake 20 March (CC) and 4 adults at Rawlings Lake 16-18 April (ST; CS; AC). Cackling Geese were found in very small numbers among Canada Geese from 18 March (3 at Otter Lake, GD; CS) to at least 17 April (at least 2 at

Rawlings Lake, CS). Trumpeter Swans wintered in small numbers on the North Arm of Okanagan Lake. By early March they frequented the valley of Deep Creek between Highway 97 and Armstrong. Numbers were repeatedly seen headed north of Armstrong and likely had good grazing areas n. of Enderby. The highest count for Otter Lake was 117 standing on the ice 8 March (CS) while 120 were counted near Grindrod 10 March (RB). On the other hand Tundra Swans were very uncommon for this reporting period.

Thin snow cover resulted in very few meltwater pools in the farming areas of the North Okanagan. In spring, 2020, Mallards, American Wigeon, Northern Pintails, and Green-winged Teal congregated in the upper hundreds and even low thousands in flooded fields of the Otter Lake area. Spring 2021 saw much lower numbers, with the same species seen in flocks in the low hundreds, or lower, in the case of Green-winged Teal.



above: Green-winged Teal, by Claude Rioux

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Birds of the North Okanagan continued

One Eurasian Green-winged Teal was noted in the Otter Lake area 10-15 March (CS: DC). Redheads formerly occurred in flocks sometimes numbering 2000+, especially on Okanagan Lake near Penticton. A flock of 140 at Okanagan Landing 4 March (JVD) was a good sighting. Greater Scaups continued their apparent decline. Rose's Pond remained a favoured location to see Greaters as well as Lesser Scaups of course. Ring-necked Duck numbers continued strong, especially at the Armstrong Sewage Lagoons where an interesting hybrid drake, showing characteristics of both Ring-necked Duck and a scaup, was present 6 and 8 March (CS). An early Red-breasted Merganser was at the north end of thawing Swan Lake 16 March (CS).

Grouse-like Birds

The only report of a Wild Turkey was of a single bird at Lone Pine Ranch, Vernon Commonage 20 April (MM). Margaret reports that a flock of 7 regularly frequents the ranch. Up to 13 have been seen in a flock at nearby Tompson Lake in 2020. Other N. Okanagan locations where turkeys have been seen in the last three years include Rawlings Lake Road, Sunset Properties along Eastside Road and the Allan Brooks Nature Centre.

A bold Spruce Grouse made himself up close and familiar with cross-country skiers in the Sovereign Lake area through the winter and into March. He

was most frequently reported by MM. An identification note: Spruce Grouse are high altitude grouse, well named for the habitat they live in, and are not found at lower elevations, like Douglas-fir-Ponderosa Pine forest. If you have seen a Spruce Grouse-like bird in the valley, it was very likely a Dusky Grouse.

below: Spruce Grouse, by Claude Rioux

**Grebes**

Once again the water level of Rawlings Lake is very high and has drowned almost all emergent vegetation that the 100 or so pairs of Eared Grebes depend upon for nest anchorages. This hasn't prevented very small numbers of Eared Grebes from returning to Rawlings where the first of the year was seen 6 April (ST).

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*Birds of the North Okanagan continued***Cranes**

The first of our local Sandhill Cranes was spotted 3 April at Rawlings Lake (CS). Two were photographed near Otter Lake 8 April (AC) and 4 flew by ST's yard off Whitevale and Horner roads, Lumby, 14 April (ST). One was at the Otter Lake marsh 23 and 24 April (CS, PMc), with 2 at Rawlings Lake 20 April (ST).

Shorebirds

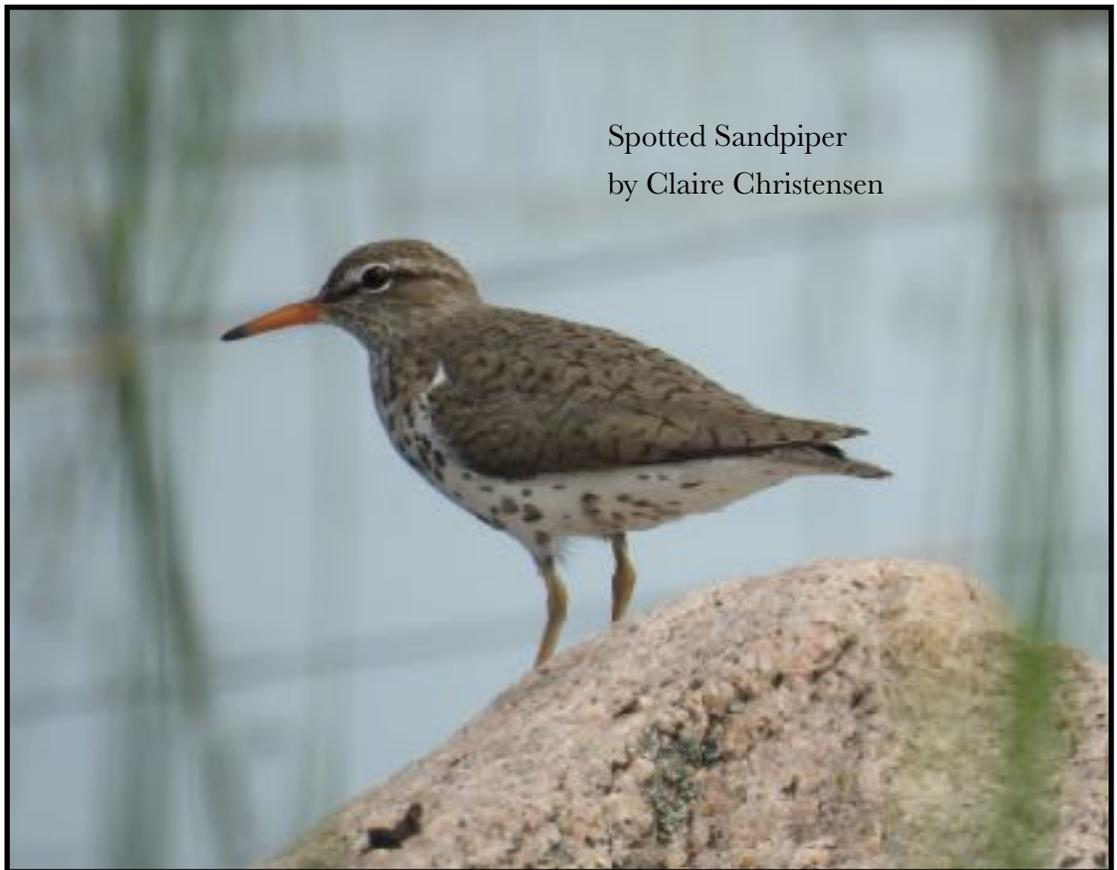
A Black-necked Stilt is a spring rarity slowly extending its breeding range into southern interior B.C. BC's first stilt this spring was at Otter Lake 18 April (CS). Later in April multiples were seen at Salmon Arm, Balfour, and Kelowna. There were only three detections of Long-billed Curlews, one heard calling from fields east of Otter Lake Road near its junction with St. Anne Road 2 and 25 April (CS) and another seen at Rawlings Lake 19

April (ST). A lone Least Sandpiper appeared at Otter Lake marsh 19 April (CS). A Baird's Sandpiper photographed at the mouth of Vernon Creek, Okanagan Landing, may be the first documented North Okanagan spring record (JVD). A Lesser Yellowlegs was near Gregory Pond 22 April (CS). The spring's first Solitary Sandpiper was at a

meltwater pool near Otter Lake and St. Anne roads 25 April (CS).

Gulls

The patterns of gull movements in the North Okanagan were re-confirmed this winter and early spring as observers (mainly CS) counted numbers at the sandbar gull loafing area at Okanagan Landing. Cold weather in Jan. sent California Gulls out of the area, while Herring Gull counts rose to about 120



Spotted Sandpiper
by Claire Christensen

adults per Jan. visits. California Gull numbers increased with warmer temperatures as February turned to March. Glaucous-winged Gull and Glaucous-winged Gull hybrid numbers declined throughout March.

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Birds of the North Okanagan continued

In March and April gull migration north through the area followed two routes: north out of the valley through Armstrong-Enderby or east through Lumby and then north-east past Rawlings Lake. Most of these gulls appeared to be California Gulls but further study is needed. Three hundred and fifty Ring-billed Gulls and 550 California Gulls on 10 March at Mara (RB; DM) marked the beginning of spring gull migration. How the buildup of California Gulls in early spring on Kalamalka Lake remains to be learned.

A first-year Glaucous Gull was at the mouth of Vernon Creek 25 Feb. (CS). Bonaparte's Gulls appeared in numbers 24 April with over a hundred at Swan Lake (CS, LM, CC). Among the Bonaparte's Gull on 24 April was an adult Franklin's Gull, a stray from its Prairie Provinces breeding range (CS).

Pelicans

American White Pelicans migrate through the Okanagan Valley to their only provincial nesting area, Stum and Putzi lakes in the Chilcotin. Forty-six rest during a day of occasional strong headwinds at Otter Lake marsh 24 April (CS).

Most departed about 9 a.m. the next day, leaving

only 7 behind for a few extra hours of loafing before resuming their flight northwest (PMc).

Vultures, Hawks, and Allies

A pair of Northern Harriers returned to Swan Lake Nature Reserve Park 15 March and are showing signs of breeding. There were only 3 Rough-legged Hawk sightings for the entire period, probably the lowest count ever for this once fairly common winter resident and migrant.

Falcons

Single Peregrine Falcons appeared four times this period: Otter Lake 8 March (CS), likely the same bird photographed 18 March (JVD), Lumby 15 March (ST) and Otter Lake 18 April (CS).



above: American White Pelicans, by Jack VanDyk

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*Birds of the North Okanagan continued***Kinglets**

It's always exciting to find a Golden-crowned Kinglet in migration as LM did on two occasions at the Brooks Centre 3 and 19 April.

Finches

Kalamalka Lake Prov. Park remained a winter stronghold for Pine Grosbeaks, where they fed on the remainder of last year's wild fruit. The last lowland Pine Grosbeaks were 7 in the park 8 March (JVD). Small numbers of Evening Grosbeaks were noted at a few locations including 6 at Roche Point Drive 8 March (GL) and several along Monoshee Drive atop Silver Star village throughout the reporting period (CS). The redpoll-free winter ended with a few individuals reported during the early spring. Red Crossbills became reasonably frequent, though by no means common during March and April. The largest flock reported was of 30 on Vernon Hill 15 March (CR). White-winged Crossbills in the valley bottom are always notable so 12 at Cools Pond 7 March were a treat (JVD) as were 2 at the Brooks Centre 5 April (LM). Pine Siskins appeared to be widespread in April with males seen performing flight songs.

Snow Bunting

The only report of this uncommon spring transient was of 7 at Rawlings Lake 28 March (ST;CS).

Blackbirds

Red-winged Blackbirds stay in the North Okanagan throughout winter, but mostly in quite local situations like at landfills and near bird feeders. Males vastly outnumber females in winter; it's not unusual to find exclusively male flocks. As January turns to February, males often

sing in marshes, but with the occasional return of cold weather will flock together again temporarily. Flocks of females begin arriving from late March and April and pair formation commences. During a 'soft' spring nesting can be well underway by mid April.

Wood Warblers

Yellow-rumped Warblers are invariably the first of our wood warblers to appear as migrants. Both Audubon's and Myrtle subspecies occur, as well as obvious intergrades between these two types. Audubon's occur earliest. Occasionally the first Yellow-rumped 'Audubon's' are found as early as late March, with flocks occurring often around wetlands by mid-April. The second warbler to occur is much harder to find. This is the Nashville Warbler. The first Nashvilles don't sing much. The first this year was seen 20 April at the Enderby Cliffs (JW).❖



above: Nashville Warbler; by Claude Rioux

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Notes from Your President

by Marnie Williamson

HOW I have missed our regular meetings over the past year. The alternative Zoom meetings have been interesting, and informative and the entire executive hopes you have enjoyed them. It seems this will be the norm for quite awhile longer. So, please tune in if you have not done so.

In spite of all the weirdness in our world lately, your dedicated executive has been very active in behind the scenes over the past year and I wanted to highlight a few.

Swan Lake Observation Tower is nearing completion as we hope for deficiencies to be rectified and final inspection to occur before June. We applaud and give gracious accolades to Norbert Maertens for going above and beyond in stepping up to be our project manager, innovative engineer, designer, tool wielder, all with a cheery disposition. Regional District North Okanagan (RDNO) will now take over the final organization. Norbert has constructed a cairn for a time capsule to be installed before the year end. Let us know if you wish to contribute, or have any ideas. Keep posted for our announcements of 'ribbon cutting ceremony' and 'time capsule internment'.

Swan Lake Nature Reserve Habitat Inventory. We applied and received grant funding from RDNO North Okanagan Conservation Fund to conduct a habitat typing inventory and restoration planning of Swan Lake. Originally this was to include a bird inventory but unforeseen circumstances required a change of scope. The habitat mapping will

allow us to complete a restoration plan targeting high value habitat with a bird focus. We hope at least one short-term restoration planting will be conducted this fall and wish to engage the public as well as our members. Associated Environmental has been contracted to conduct this analysis. Harold Sellers has volunteered to be our project manager for this.

Cools Pond : RDNO installed a new observation platform and fencing around Cools Pond. Since we were concerned about the new path along the south side and the potential of the public creating paths into bird nesting areas, we installed signage to educate and promote awareness of this. This spring, RDNO will reinstall the original interpretive signage inside the new platform.

Rose's Pond (pictured below) : We have initiated a conversation with the City of Vernon regarding the management and future plans for Rose's Pond. The executive feels the pond and surrounding fenced land



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Notes from Your President continued

should become a protected natural area with no public access. We are seeking support from the City for NONC to take on official stewardship and have a sublease agreement with City and BC Ministry of Forest and Lands (FLNRORD). We see the need for installing new sunning logs for turtles, perching poles along the shoreline, turtle nesting enhancement, waterfowl nest boxes and the important improved fencing. If we obtain stewardship of this important area, it will be a joy to include volunteers from our general membership. Definitely an interesting and ongoing project.

Crane Road Park : This small RDNO park on Swan Lake has a great potential to become a nature study area with lake side access. At the end of March, a small group of NONC members and executive did a walk-about and brainstormed on future restoration and public access. Harold Sellers summarized this into a suggestion for a 5-year plan, which he forwarded to Bob Fleming, Area C Representative. Another area that NONC can engage the public in a tree and shrub planting restoration project.

I have recapped a bit of what the executive has been up to over the last 12 months and I greatly thank each of them for their dedication to NONC and the nature we revere.

We welcome and greatly encourage any ideas or input you may have about NONC activities. Or maybe you have new ideas that could be chewed upon. Please contact any of the executive via email. We miss you and love to hear from you. Hopefully our Saturday walks and group outings will resume by the fall. See you then. ❖

What's In a Name: BISCUITROOT

via Mother Earth News

When the Lewis and Clark expedition reached Idaho's Lemhi Valley, its members were surprised to discover that the region's Shoshone tribespeople had huge, thin biscuits about 1 foot by 2 feet to offer in trade for the goods carried by the explorers. The large cakes, called *konse*, weren't actually biscuits as we know them, though ... in fact, they were prepared from the dried roots of *Lomatium*, a member of the Umbelliferae (carrot or parsley) family. That edible wild plant is now commonly known as *biscuitroot*.

Across much of western North America, today's foragers can still enjoy this spring wildling.

There are approximately 80 species of *Lomatium* found within the plant's range. They're known by such common names as carrot leaf, fern leaf, desert parsley, parsley, *konse*, and whiskbroom. These small (usually between 2" and 12" tall) perennials appear in early spring.

The plant's roots will range from stubby, radish-shaped growths to long, slender "fingers," depending upon the species harvested. The rounder types will average from 2" to 4" in length and from 1/2" to 2" in diameter. The thin roots, which are often quite difficult to dig up, may be from 4" to 12" long and only 1/4" to 3/4" across. In either case, the underground "biscuits" will be covered with a thin black skin (which should be removed before they're used), and will be white and fibrous inside.

The mildly flavored roots can be boiled, roasted, or eaten raw. To make a reasonable facsimile of traditional *konse*, you can dry your find, then grind it into a flour that can be mixed with water and shaped into a tortilla-like "biscuit." ❖

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Wild Potatoes

by Margaret Mackenzie
photos by Bev Ramey

WESTERN Spring Beauty (*Claytonia lanceolata*), the pretty little wildflower that has been blooming for much of April, has brought back memories of the summer I went with BC Nature on an exploration and birding backpack to Potato Mountain. It was early July and there was still snow on the mountainsides around us, but looking down into the subalpine meadows at what we thought was snow, was actually a thick white carpet of Spring Beauty flowers! Although most of us had seen Spring Beauty before, never had we seen them in such profusion and so large.



In fact, Western Spring Beauty grew so abundantly there, that the area was known by the First Nation community for centuries as a special gathering place for an important food source - the Wild Mountain Potato. Each flower of the Western Spring Beauty has 2 sepals, 2 fleshy lance-shaped leaves, and 5 petals which are white to pink or white with pink veins. The root is a corm, the largest maybe the size of a walnut, most much smaller. These corms are high in starches and sugars and taste somewhat like potatoes.

Potato Mountain is a small mountain range situated between Chilko and Tatlayoko Lake in the Chilcotin. It is actually a long ridge, rather plateau-like, with open subalpine meadows and dotted with small tarns. Here, the First Nations

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Wild Potatoes continued from page 9

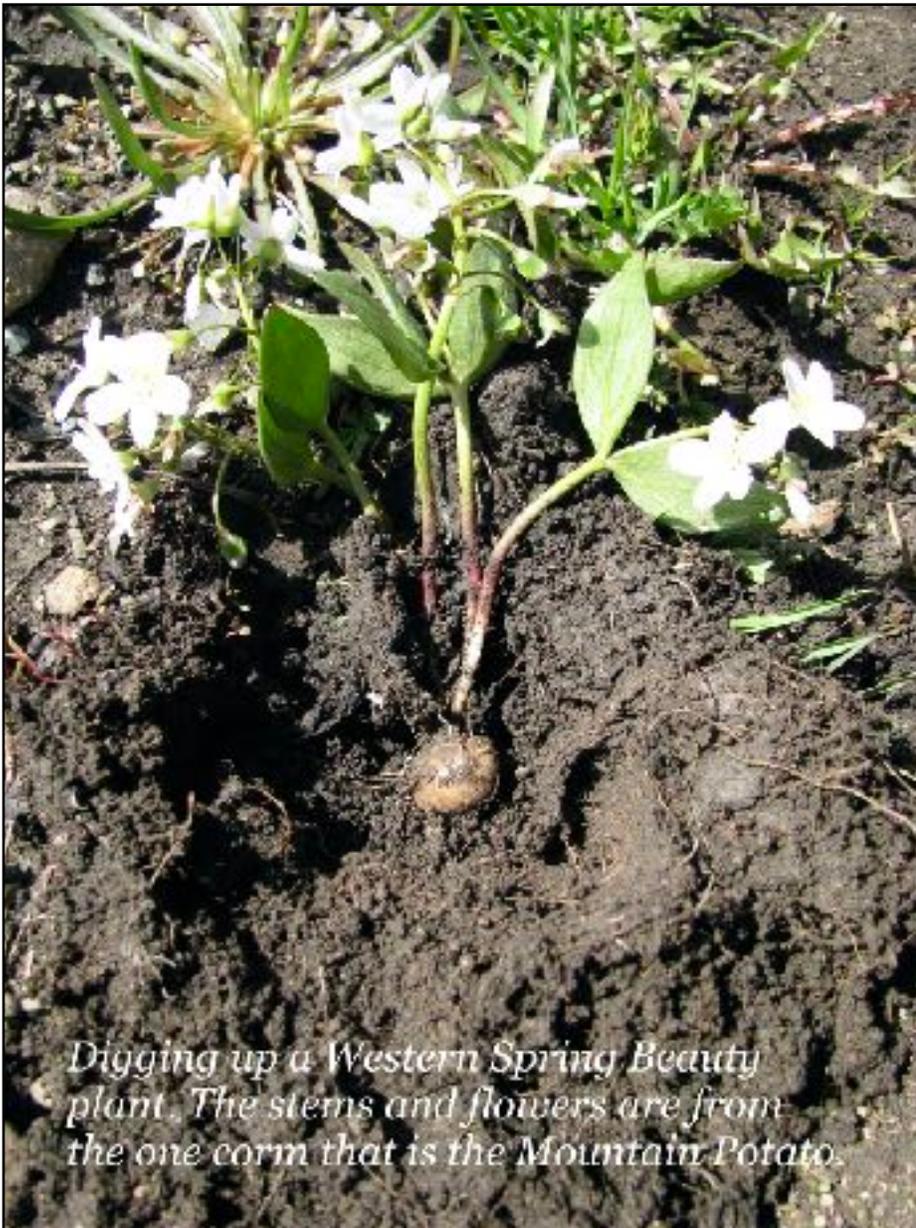
from the Chilcotin came together for generations to hunt, trade, socialize and dig roots and wild plants, the most important being the Wild Mountain Potato. They would walk and ride horse to congregate in large camps in early summer. Later, they used wagons pulled by horses and even today some groups make the annual trek to Potato Mountain to

dig roots and gather the Wild Potato. Some of the elders even fly in by helicopter! Traditionally the women dug the potatoes once the flowers had faded and then the corms were peeled, eaten raw, pit roasted, steamed or dried for winter.

Western Spring Beauty is found in woods, thickets, and moist slopes and subalpine meadows of BC with the most extensive use by the First Nation

community from the central and southern interior of BC. At Botanie Valley near Lillooet, the importance of the Mountain Potato along with Glacier Lily bulbs and other wild plants also attracted huge gatherings of the First Nations people once the snow had vacated the subalpine meadows. In both places, fires were used to control burn and keep the meadows open. Burning helped reduce competitive plant growth and allow for larger plants with larger bulbs, and from historical ethnobotanical records, apparently some the size of a man's fist! As well, a form of gardening occurred as smaller corms would be replanted and in other areas where the plants grew thicker, they would be thinned.

You can see from the photos of the plants that we dug up that the corm is about the size of a quarter. We peeled the brown skin from the small corms and then tasted them raw. They had the consistency of a crisp potato with a sweetish pleasant taste. It was good to know we wouldn't starve if our freeze-dried food ran out! ❖



Digging up a Western Spring Beauty plant. The stems and flowers are from the one corm that is the Mountain Potato.

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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.



MONTHLY MEETINGS

currently suspended

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. Due to COVID-19 annual dues have been reduced to \$20 for an individual or student and \$35 for a couple or family. Every member should also complete a Waiver form, available at our website membership page.

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