

NEWSPACKET

N O V E M B E R - D E C E M B E R 2 0 2 0



Anna's Hummingbird
a regular visitor to Jack & Lisa VanDyk's backyard in October
and November
photo by Jack

NONC

Winter Berries and Seeds*by Margaret MacKenzie*

IN November our migratory birds have long since gone but what do our remaining resident birds eat all winter while their other feathered friends are dining on rich fruits and new fresh seeds from sunny warm places? Well, there is a menu still here for birds to survive on. I say survive because weather extremes can make life intolerant and bird losses must be significant during those times.

What berry and fruit producing trees and shrubs can we see while walking along our trails in winter months? It's easy to pick out the deep red hanging berries from the Barberry shrubs. These remain most of the winter and birds do feed on them, but possibly they are not their favourite, any more than the white berries sprinkled here and there on the Snowberry bushes. Privet shrubs carry small black berries not really desirable but edible. Birds quite like the dried up Saskatoon berries if they can find any left over from summer and they feast on the Choke Cherry and Black Hawthorne dried berries. The Oregon Grape shrub berries and Wild Rose hips are eaten as well. It's great to see old dried up apples being eaten by Robins in the orchards and later the Bohemian Waxwings will descend into orchards to gobble them up too. A favourite of Bohemian Waxwings are the Mountain Ash berries. Huge waxwing

flocks spiral through the air suddenly descending into the trees leaving them almost stripped bare. All in all, there is usually food for the berry and fruit eating birds.

Along our trails we come across other trees and shrubs that produce seeds for our birds. The Manitoba Maple or Box Elder provides hanging clusters of maple seeds that Evening Grosbeaks and Pine Grosbeaks enjoy. Black Locust trees have hanging seed pods that are eaten by small flocks of Grosbeaks as well as other seed loving birds. House Finches, Juncos, Goldfinches, Chickadees, and Nuthatches all feed from thistle, sunflower and mullein seed heads, Birch tree seeds are especially desired by birds such as Pine Siskins and Redpolls, and wild grasses and weeds provide seed for Song Sparrows. The conifers provide seeds that Canada

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Winter Berries and Seeds continued

Jays, Clark's Nutcrackers, Pine Siskins and Crossbills all dig out from the cones.

But, natural wild food sources can become scarce. Seeds eventually fall from grasses and weeds and are buried under snowfalls. Coniferous tree cone production can be low one



Bohemian waxwings feeding on Mountain Ash Berries



Pine Grosbeak eating ornamental cherries

year, or shrubs have fewer fruits and berries than usual. Then, birds are left frantically searching for foods in order to stay alive. Backyard feeders providing nutritious seed, nuts and fruits, fill in these gaps by being readily available.

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Winter Berries and Seeds continued

On our walks we can watch the birds feeding on the various native and non-native shrubs and trees and then plant similar ones in our own gardens. In my small back yard I have a Saskatoon bush, a Ponderosa Pine, a Mountain Ash, Oregon Grape shrubs and a Mock Orange bush. These native shrubs and trees entice the birds to feel at home while eating black oil sunflower seed from my feeder. 🌍



Evening Grosbeaks eating seeds from the Locust Tree pods



Seeds from the Black Locust pods



White-winged Crossbill feeding on Fir cone seeds

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Birds of the North Okanagan, Part 10: 7 Sept. – 28 Oct. 2020

by Chris Siddle

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

Special thanks to observers Roger Beardmore (RB); Don Cecile (DC); Chris Charlesworth (CC); Mike Force (MF); Glen Goerzen (GG); Doug Kragh (DK); Gail Loughridge (GL); Margaret Mackenzie (MM); Trish Reid (TR); Claude Rioux (CR); Chris Siddle (CS); Scott Thomson (ST); Jack VanDyk (JVD); Wayne Weber (WW).

SEPTEMBER 2020 was the warmest September in weather history around the world. Only about 30% of normal precipitation fell in the Okanagan Valley. Possibly the mild, mostly clear weather as well as a very good wild fruit crop allowed some passerine migrants to pass down the valley at higher elevations than normal, largely bypassing the lowlands. No cold fronts occurred to “dam up” warblers and sparrows, and so migrants in general were harder to detect in the valley bottom and lower elevations than normal. The general effect, whatever the cause, was fewer sightings of songbirds in September. High water levels continued well into September, limiting shorebird habitat most obviously at Salmon Arm Bay. In the North Okanagan shorebird migration can be described as a dribble of assorted waders.

October was mild at first but with the passing of a series of Pacific cold fronts became wet and cool by mid-month, with winter seeming to occur very early and abruptly on 23 Oct. when several cms of snow fell. A notable waterfowl migration south became obvious on 18 October. However, milder, cloudy weather prevailed thereafter.

In my last summary I mentioned several birds that have become rare or disappeared from the Okanagan Valley since the 1980s. In the current summary I will comment upon a few that have become more common since then. These include Glaucous-winged Gull, Broad-winged Hawk, Swamp Sparrow, and White-throated Sparrow.



above: Snow Buntings, photographed by Claude Rioux

Geese, Swans, and Ducks

Like last fall Snow Geese appeared first as singles among Canada Goose flocks, with the first local bird at MacKay Reservoir 15 Oct. (ST). Scott also spotted the largest group of the fall so far, 127 over Whitevale Rd. s.w. of Lumby on 16 Oct. Greater White-fronted Geese appeared early with a group of seven at Otter Lake 8-10 Sept. and two adults at

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Birds of the North Okanagan continued

Rawlings Lake 30 Sept. which remained through at least two and a half weeks of Oct. (ST). The first Trumpeter Swans (18) appeared over Okeefe Pond 19 Oct. soon followed by five spotted at Rawlings Lake 21 Oct. (JVD). Cackling Geese are proving to be regular but uncommon migrants, occurring usually as singles or in flocks of less than 10 in the North Okanagan. The first of the season was a very small bird at Rawlings Lake 11 Oct. (ST; CS). Bufflehead can appear in tight flocks of hundreds as they migrate through the interior south or to coastal areas. The first sizeable flock (130) appeared on the north end of Kalamalka Lake 18 Oct. On 25 Oct. at least 450 were present in three flocks at the same location.



above: Common Mergansers, photographed by Claude Rioux

The earliest Common Goldeneye was a male among Buffleheads on Kalamalka L. 25 Oct. On 27 Oct. an adult male and an immature male were on Goose Lake. The first sizeable flock of Common Mergansers (32) appeared on Otter Lake 26 Oct. Watch for large rafts of Common Mergansers to

appear on Swan Lake during Nov. as sometimes happens.

Grouse

Both Spruce and Dusky grouse were spotted by TR near her home atop Silver Star Mtn. in Oct. Thirteen Wild Turkeys were spotted foraging on the rangeland on the east side of Thomson Lake 4 Oct. (CS).

Grebes

Up to seven Western Grebes continued on Swan Lake throughout the reporting period. Eared Grebes continued to linger on Rawlings Lake well into Oct. with a count of 20 on 17 Oct. (DK; MF; CS). Sightings in several areas within the southern half of the province suggested that there was a movement of Eared Grebes across south BC on 17-18 October.

One was with Horned Grebes at the north end of Kalamalka Lake 17 Oct. (CS; MF; DK) while 9 were in a loose flock on Swan Lake 18 Oct.

Hummingbirds

An Anna's Hummingbird was resident at a property along Pottery Road for most of the reporting period and was well photographed several times (JVD). Anna's Hummingbird was originally a year-round resident of the California coast where it evolved to survive where flowers and other food sources thrived all year. In the mid twentieth century it began to push northwards along the coast reaching mild s.w. Vancouver-Victoria. by at least 1957. The other four species of hummingbirds found in B.C. are highly migratory, only very rarely found anywhere in the province after early September. However, Anna's Hummingbird continues to spread into the interior attempting to remain year-round. In

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Birds of the North Okanagan continued

our seasonal climate, Anna's Hummingbird becomes dependent upon hummingbird feeders and so is quite conspicuous as "the winter hummingbird". Reports in the Okanagan were quite unusual in the 1980s, but now each winter several Anna's attempt to spend the cold months living close to regularly filled feeders.

Gulls

Franklin's Gull is a rare semi-annual visitor to the N. Okanagan. This season's single was a first-fall type first spotted 16 Oct. at Okanagan Landing (RB) and subsequently seen 17 Oct. (JVD). The Mew Gull is a slightly less rare visitor as well. One juvenile frequented the n. end of Kalamalka Lake 24 Sept., 17 Oct. and 29 Oct. (CS; MF; DK). The earliest Iceland (Thayer's) Gull of the fall were identified on 14 Oct. at the Rotary Pier, n. Kal. L. Yet another species that has become much more frequent in the valley since the publication of Cannings' Birds of the Okanagan Valley (1987) is the Glaucous-winged Gull. Up to twenty can usually be spotted around Vernon, especially at the mouth of Coldstream Creek, from late Sept. onwards. Some individuals remain in the Valley to breed, sometimes hybridizing with Herring Gulls on Grant (Whiskey) Island (DC, pers. comm.) An early Glaucous Gull appeared at Okanagan Landing Oct. (WW).

Hawks and Allies

Golden Eagles are uncommon residents and migrants in the lowlands. One imm. was seen migrating south over Silver Star Mountain 7 Oct. and a second imm. passed over east Vernon during the cold snap of 25 Oct. The only Northern Harrier regularly reported during late summer was a juvenile at Swan Lake Nature Reserve Park. However single migrants began appearing in the lowlands about mid Sept. onwards. Swainson's Hawks departed gradually

from late Aug. through early Sept. and will not be seen again until late April when they return from Argentina. Broad-winged Hawk was formerly not found in B.C. until the first was seen in 1965. In the 1970s and 1980s the Broad-winged Hawk expanded its range westwards from boreal Alberta into B.C.'s Peace River region. Since then it has spread into north and central interior B.C. In southern and southwest B.C. it has become regular migrant, particularly in September and early October. Multiples are recorded most days during this period at the hawk watch at the south end of Vancouver Island. In the Okanagan migrant Broad-wings are seen most frequently in the Kelowna area simply because that's where the highest number of Okanagan birders live. On 21 Sept. three adults passed together over MacKay Reservoir, providing the only 2020 record for the period. The only Rough-legged Hawk appeared in the fields s.e. of Mutrie Park 18 and 25 Oct.

A particularly whitish Red-tailed Hawk, possibly a light morph Harlan's Hawk, appeared at the south end of Swan Lake 26 Oct. and was photographed 27 Oct. (Eamon Riordan-Short). A dark morph Red-tail was at Lakeshore Drive, Okanagan Landing, 27 Oct.

Owls

The only Northern Pygmy Owl of the early season was spotted near Rim Rocks above Lavington 17 Sept. (MM). A Barred Owl was spotted in the Bench Row Road cottonwood plantation 22 Oct. (ST).

Falcons

The handful of Peregrine reports came from Otter Lake and Rawlings Lake where waterfowl concentrate. American Kestrels continued to show much depleted numbers throughout the season while Merlins seemed in healthy numbers. A good area to

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Birds of the North Okanagan continued

A good area to look for Merlins is the BX Dog Park along BX Road where a pair seems in residence.



above: Northern Pygmy-owl, photographed by Claude Rioux

Vireos

A very late Cassin's Vireo was seen along the Polson Park boardwalk 28-29 Oct. (CS; m.obs).

Crows, ravens, jays and other corvids

A Canada Jay (formerly Gray Jay) appeared at a feeder s.w. of Lumby on 25 Oct. (ST) for a very rare valley bottom record.

Swallows

Violet-green Swallows in general departed in September but could be occasionally encountered, sometimes in flocks of 25-50+ birds, to at least 12 Oct. Late single Bank and Cliff swallows were at Okeefe Pond 15 Sept.

Wrens

Marsh Wrens are occasionally resident in the Okanagan Valley; however, the majority are migratory. In spring the species is restricted to marshes, but in fall favours a wider variety of habitats including dry weedy fields. Four were seen in the tall weeds at dry sites in Swan Lake Nature Reserve Park on 17 Oct. (MM; GL) and 6 there 20 Oct. (CS).

Thrushes

In the Okanagan Hermit Thrushes breed in the boreal forests high in the surrounding mountains. Migrants are seldom detected in the valley bottom. One was seen along the Polson Park boardwalk 28 Oct. (CS; GG).

Finches and allies

Red Crossbills continued to be reported sparsely throughout the period. The expected invasion of this erratic finch has yet to materialize this season. White-winged Crossbills were unreported. Pine Grosbeaks were represented only by occasional reports of small numbers from Silver Star Village. Pine Siskins became much less common and less widespread than they were in spring and summer.

New World Sparrows

The last two newcomers to the Okanagan Valley that I'll mention in this summary are Swamp Sparrow and White-throated Sparrow. The White-throated Sparrow is not so much a newcomer as a species that has steadily increased its breeding population in central B.C. and so has dramatically increased as a migrant and winterer in the Okanagan. In the 1980s a White-throat was considered a good find on a fall or winter's day. Now small flocks of 2-12 birds can be encountered in favourable brushy habitat in late

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Birds of the North Okanagan continued

Sept.- Oct. A flock of at least 12, if not 15+, was flushed from the woods edge at BX Dog Park 18 Sept. while JVD had at least 5 at his feeder on Pottery Rd. 25 Sept. A few White-throats remain through winter. When residents at Desert Cove Estates are feeding birds, that's a good place to look for overwintering White-throated Sparrows. Swamp Sparrows also expanded their breeding range west from Alberta into n. and e. B.C. with the first OK record in March 1987. Slowly thereafter this sparrow that favours cool woodland-edge marshes appeared as a fall migrant and occasional winter resident in the Okanagan. Because of their wetland habitat and sometimes shy habits, Swamp Sparrows are still not detected very often. Most records come from Kelowna where most Okanagan birders live. The North Okanagan had but one record this reporting period – a single heard at Kalavista Lagoon 17 Oct. (MF; DK; CS).

Blackbirds and Allies

Eight Yellow-headed Blackbirds were detected among a flock of Red-winged

Blackbirds near Okeefe Pond 17 Oct. (MM;GL). Two were in more or less the same spot 19 Oct. Yellow-headed Blackbirds are migratory but a few linger every fall, sometimes well into winter. Don't look for them in marshes; they will be mixed among other blackbirds usually around feedlots and farmyards.

Wood Warblers

It was a poor season for warblers until a Prairie Warbler was spotted along the Polson Park boardwalk 27 Oct. (GG). 🌍

below: The rare Prairie Warbler, photographed by Jack VanDyk, and seen at Polson Park as recently as 8 Nov. by Claude Rioux and others



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Vernon Nest Box and Bluebird Report 2020

by Margaret MacKenzie
Bluebird Trails
Coordinator

THIS 2020 year has been very different with the Covid 19 virus as part of our lives, and it caused the cancellation of the annual spring bluebird workshop. However, being monitors on trails allowed us to continue our work over the summer months, observing and recording nest box developments. We were fortunate to be able to find purpose in our weekly jaunts to our bluebird trails, enjoying the freedom to move about in our beautiful hills.

Spring began well enough for migrating birds with bluebirds arriving on schedule and beginning their nesting unaware of the pandemic. However, by June when both Tree Swallows and bluebirds were at the height of raising their young, some badly-timed rains played havoc with the young nestlings who were dependent on their parents for food. Unable to have the flying insects they required during several periods of rain, many young hatchlings didn't survive. It was a difficult and unhappy time for we monitors, watching the young die with no way of helping them. How do you catch the thousands of flying insects needed to feed the babies unless you are a swallow? If the insects aren't flying due to rain and cold, there is no recourse.



The resilience of birds in general showed itself as many pairs began laying eggs again and going through the process of rearing young. By summer's end Western Bluebirds especially had done well (73 pairs fledging 290 hatchlings), and our counts were better than all other years since 2009. (We have no results for previous years.)

Loretta Bemister at Adventure Bay had 9 boxes used by WEBB and they fledged 53 young. Mountain Bluebird pairs nesting here continue to be low, although the ten pairs that did nest in our area had good results fledging 54 young.

Tree Swallows fared badly compared to most other years, with less than 50 percent of eggs laid resulting in fledged hatchlings. House Wrens seldom have disastrous nesting results and so as usual did well. If all the birds nesting could use their techniques of filling the box with hard sticks and tucking the nest in the lower back part of the box, as wrens do, they too might avoid the predators and the cold that causes their own demise!

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Bluebirds continued

Trish Reid, at Silver Star, has been attempting to entice Mountain Bluebirds into her nest boxes and away from man-made structures such as roof overhangs and vents. Tree Swallows have used them and hopefully next year bluebirds will choose to do so too. One of her boxes had the first Mountain Chickadees on our trails to nest in a box. They produced 5 offspring. Another first was at Middleton Mountain where Catherine Gardner monitored a pair of Mountain Bluebirds that raised and fledged 4 young. Ruth and Rod Drennan have had Black-capped Chickadees nesting successfully at the Seed Orchard for 7 years. This year a second nesting produced a total of 10 fledged young.

Trying to deter House Sparrows from being successful with any nest they build on our bluebird trails is extremely important and we are learning to deal with this problem in various ways. Marnie Williamson and Joan Wilkinson were persistent in using egg pricking to discourage them and succeeded in having only 2 young fledge out of 20 eggs laid in 6 different boxes! Loretta Bemister at Adventure Bay had a HOSP build a nest in a box right next to a bluebird nest with eggs and she diligently punctured the eggs every 2 days on 3 separate occasions. Each time she came back the eggs had been discarded and



new ones laid in place. However, eventually the HOSPS gave up and abandoned their nest without hurting the bluebirds raising their young next door. Norbert Maertens had two interesting solutions to his HOSP problem and took a clutch of deserted (parents died) bluebird eggs, and substituted the HOSP eggs for them. The HOSPS did incubate the bluebird eggs but they never hatched. The other method he used

was to replace newly laid HOSP eggs with some eggs saved from last year to fool the birds. Both are innovative ideas for use in the future! So far with diligent monitoring of the boxes and replacing, removing, and /or pricking the eggs, plus discarding nests, we have been able to

successfully prevent their proliferation. Thanks to the monitors involved in this process, we can hope our trails will be safe from becoming HOSP trails.

The wet weather caused serious problems with ants infesting some nest boxes causing the parents to abandon the hatchlings. We tried various methods to deal with this including moving the hatchlings into a clean new nest, and then placing ant bait under the box. (It's a good idea to save a nest or two from a trail that never was used.) Sometimes moving the whole nest and young to a new box 'next door' works too.

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Bluebirds continued

We have two goals this coming year to work on and help improve our nest box program. Last year at our SIBTS AGM, a NABS (North American Bluebird Society) representative recommended our program use NestWatch, an American nationwide monitoring program implemented by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. It tracks status and trends in the reproductive biology of birds, including when nesting occurs, number of eggs laid, how many eggs hatch and how many hatchlings survive. To this end, some of us tried it out on our individual trails this summer. It is easy to use as you monitor the nest boxes along your trail using a smart phone with the NestWatch app.

We can't do anything to protect our birds against weather, other than ensuring they are in good shape. However, we had more losses of eggs and hatchlings

due to predators than the weather. Snakes appeared to be the main predator, although some culprits such as squirrels and weasels could also be responsible. Next year we hope to address this problem and put predator guards on certain trails that have been consistently targeted with large losses. Charlie Peti has had no losses from predators since he added stove pipe guards to the boxes on his Ranchlands trails. Both Predator Ridge and the French property trail need some protection and looking for the easiest design and method of putting these in place is our goal this year. We are asking for a larger budget to cover the costs of this predator control measure. Our mandate is to monitor the nest boxes which includes protection of the bluebirds.

As always, we thank the monitors of the Bluebird Trails. Without them, there would be no trails and we would be short the 344 Western and Mountain Bluebirds fledged in the Vernon area this year. 🌍

Vernon & Area 2020 Results

Total # of Nestboxes Available : 414

Total # of Nestboxes Used: 302

Cavity Nesting Species	Boxes Used	Eggs Laid	Eggs Hatched	Chicks Fledged	2nd Nestings in same box
Western Bluebird	73	453	377	290	17
Mountain Bluebird	9	59	54	54	3
Tree Swallow	158	855	678	407	18
House Wren	73	522	440	429	16 *
Black-capped Chickadee	1	11	11	10	1
Mountain Chickadee	1	5	5	5	
White-breasted Nuthatch	1	4	4	4	
House Sparrow	10	43	2	2	
European Starling	1	3	0	0	

* also one 3rd nesting

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NONC Conservation Activities in 2020

by Harold Sellers

IN 2020 the club Executive Committee and some members were busy on several fronts, attempting to protect our natural environment, habitats and species. This is a summary of the major projects of the year.

Garter Snake Dens in Vernon

Starting off in the Spring, NONC paid for a number of large boulders to be placed beside the Garter Snake dens at Deleenheer Road in Vernon. The dens are in a boulevard between a street and a park. Many dozens of snakes are observed emerging in the spring and returning in the fall. We wanted to protect the snakes and their dens from vehicles and people. We were assisted by the Regional District of North Okanagan.



This Fall we returned and placed fence poles beside the boulders to add another level of protection (see above photo). Norbert Maertens lead this effort and was assisted by several NONC members.

Coldstream Ranchlands Park

This 135 ha (334 acre) undeveloped natural spaces park near Vernon. It is located on a hillside overlooking the city and the Coldstream Valley. Several of our club members monitor bluebird nest boxes there (photo below shows some of the park).



This past spring the local mountain biking club applied to the regional district for a grant to develop biking trails on the property. Knowing that the park was ecologically important for habitat and home to several endangered birds and mammals, NONC challenged the biking club's application. The application was turned down.

NONC is staying vigilant with the goal of the Coldstream Ranchlands being protected under a new master plan currently being written by the regional district.

Preservers of Nature: Protecting Natural Areas in the North Okanagan

The threat against Coldstream Ranchlands prompted

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Conservation continued

your editor to undertake a review of policies, regulations and zonings in the North Okanagan. I wanted to see if valued natural spaces could be protected from too much human intrusion.

The result was a 50-page report, *Preservers of Nature: Protecting Natural Areas in the North Okanagan*. NONC printed copies and delivered them to politicians and senior municipal staff, with a request to strengthen rules and regulations.

My research found that some wonderful statements concerning preservation had been made in some publications, but there were no laws and regulations in place to achieve it. Neither was there a definition of what constitutes a “protected natural area”. Across our local municipal and regional governments, policies and zonings varied. Nothing held true for the entire region.

The report can be downloaded here
<http://www.nonc.ca/publications.html>

We have formed a Preservers of Nature committee, which is working to create a definition of “protected natural area” and recommendations for how our local governments can protect our most valuable natural areas. We have also applied for a grant. If we are successful, we will employ a professional biologist to assist us.

O’Keefe Range Lands (last issue’s cover story)

This summer the remaining 2,310 acre land holdings of one of the pioneers of the Vernon area were put up for sale. The O’Keefe Range Lands have always been a grass and shrub landscape on our hills and slopes.



Although used for cattle grazing for the past 150 years, almost two thousand acres remains important habitat for plants, birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians, many of them threatened.

NONC took the step to issue a new release to the media. Entitled “*Naturalists’ Club Calls O’Keefe Range Lands a Provincial Priority for Conservation*”, it was picked up by online media and Global Okanagan TV did a story.

The news release and letters to local and provincial governments called for an innovative approach to preserve these endangered grasslands. We challenged governments, land trusts, environmental organizations and the public, to work together to find a creative way to preserve the O’Keefe Range Lands for perpetuity.

To date we have received support from the mayor of the City of Vernon. The province sent a letter of thanks, with no commitment other than to ensure major land trusts in BC were made aware of our request. We know that we have a lot of support in our municipal and regional governments, so we remain hopeful that the property will be protected. 🌍



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North Okanagan Naturalists' Club (NONC)

P.O. Box 473

Vernon, B.C. V1T 6M4

Website www.nonc.ca

EXECUTIVE

President	Marnie Williamson 250-545-4743
Vice-President	vacant
Secretary	Rod Drennan 250-545-4999
Treasurer	Ruth Drennan 250-545-4999
Directors	Rick Bonar 587-598-5719 Pam Jenkins 250-545-0490 Norbert Maertens 250-503-8790 Harold Sellers 250-307-3543 Judy Stockdale 236-426-3405 Kenn Whyte 250-838-5911

PROGRAMS & ACTIVITIES

Contact the following if you have questions.

BC Nature	Pam Jenkins 250-545-0490
Birding	Rick Bonar 587-598-5719
Bishop Wild Bird Sanctuary	Aaron Deans 250-542-5122
Bluebird Trails	Margaret Mackenzie 250-542-2712

Botany	Margaret Mackenzie 250-542-2712
Christmas Bird Count	Rick Bonar 587-598-5719
Conservation	Harold Sellers 250-307-3543
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Newsletter	Harold Sellers 250-307-3543
O.C.C.P.^	Harold Sellers 250-307-3543
Speakers	Bruce Tattersall 778-874-4614
Swan Lake	Bill Image 778-692-7909
Swan & Eagle Count	Norbert Maertens 250-503-8790 Rod Drennan 250-545-4999
Trips	Ruth Drennan 250-545-4999
Website & Social Media	Harold Sellers 250-307-3543
NatureKids	vacant

^ Okanagan Collaborative Conservation Program

LIFE MEMBERS

Ray Arlt
Kay Bartholomew*
Joan Heriot*
Phil Jones*
Malcolm Martin*
Frank* & Mary* Paul * deceased

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North Okanagan
Naturalists Club

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.

Name(s): _____

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