
North Okanagan Naturalists' Club

NEWSPACKET



May 2009, Volume 36, No. 2

| | | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------|----------------|
| President | Pam Jenkins | 545-0490 |
| Past President | Ray Arlt | 542-2058 |
| Vice-President | | |
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| Treasurer | George Wilson | 558-0374 |
| Directors | Margaret hubble | 542-2712 |
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| | Erin Nelson | 545-6878 |
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| | Lyn Smith | 542-6520 |
| | Judy Stockdale | 1-250-838-6605 |
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| Conservation | Bill Image | 503-1404 |
| EAC-City of Vernon | Jim Bodkin | 545-7455 |
| Education | Wendy Hooke | 545-9149 |
| | | |
| FBCN Delegate | Pam Jenkins | 545-0490 |
| | (sub) Peter Blokker | 545-8297 |
| LRMP | Erin Nelson | 545-6878 |
| Newspacket | | |
| Newspaper Articles: | Ray Arlt; | 542-2058 |
| | | |
| Programs; | Ann Davis | 542-8278 |
| Public Relations | Ray Arlt | 542-2058 |
| Refreshments | Ann Langer | 1-250-547-6153 |
| | Ginny McLean | 542-9948 |
| | | |
| Socials | Kay Bartholomew | 542-3977 |
| Telephone List | Robyn Thornton | 549-2714 |
| Trips; | Pam Jenkins | 545-0490 |
| Tea/Coffee | Adam Moss | 558-4775 |
| Ways & Means | | |
| Young Naturalists | Kathy Smith | 558-1647 |
| | | |
| Birding; | Peter Mayfield | 549-8478 |
| Bluebird Trails | Margaret Hubble | 542-2712 |
| Botany | Margaret Hubble | 542-2712 |
| Entomology | Phil Jones | 549-1596 |
| Hummingbird Project | Gail Loughridge | 545-7455 |
| Land Stewardship | Ann Langer | 1-250-547-6153 |
| Bishop Wildbird Sanctuary | Erin Nelson | 542-5122 |
| Swan Lake Project | Lyll Webster | 275-2661 |
| Website | Keith Bowman | 1-250-546-9475 |

NORTH OKANAGAN NATURALISTS' CLUB



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NONC usually meets on the first Wednesday of each month from September to May inclusive, starting at 7:30 pm at The Vernon Lodge, 3914 - 32nd Street, Vernon.

Opinions expressed in Newspanet are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the Club unless so described.

Articles and cover illustrations of natural history, news and events are welcome. Copy should be left with Kay Bartholomew at work (Wayside Press, 3304 - 33rd Street)

Deadline for entries is the last Thursday of the month.

Registration at monthly meetings, or send Name(s), Address, Telephone, email and cheque to:
North Okanagan Naturalists' Club
PO Box 473,
Vernon, BC V1T 6M4
Yearly dues: Single \$35.00
Family \$50.00

BIRDING

May:

- Sunday 3th,
- Sunday 17th
- Saturday 23rd
- Sunday 31th



Meet 9:00 AM – Performing Arts Centre Parking Lot

Field Trip Correction:

Saturday, June 13th – Alpaca Farm Tour. Meet at the Priest Valley parking lot at 9:45 AM.
Contact Robyn Thornton – DEADLINE - June 6. 250-549-2714

Next Meeting:

September 9: Subject to be announced

A Living Memory

A donation to the James Grant Fund is a positive way to commemorate a departed friend or relative. A card will be sent to the family concerned. The gift would be a fitting tribute to anyone who has loved the world of nature. The fund is used for environmental education.

Kindly make cheques payable to: James Grant Fund, North Okanagan Naturalists' Club, Box 473, Vernon, BC V1T 6M4

Environmental Hysteria

I am a scientist, and I've spent the majority of my life measuring things. I understand instrumentation and its limitations, and how the correct application of the instrumentation results in quantifying aspects of nature and allowing further decisions to be made. Indeed, even the process of making the measurement often leads to a further understanding of the phenomena involved.

In the past few weeks I've heard it stated that Coldstream Creek is "the sixth most polluted stream in British Columbia". Then I heard this again and again from different sources, and most recently I read it in the Sunday issue of the Vernon Morning Star. This phrase is being repeated as if by babbling monkeys in adjacent cages at the zoo. But every time I heard this phrase, it was being regurgitated without any data that supports the statement.

What are the five other more polluted streams? How is this "pollution" measured, and what reputable group has been making all these measurements? What equipment is involved in making these measurements, and what is the limit of accuracy of this equipment? How about other aspects by which pollution can be measured? Is Coldstream creek so polluted in only one means of measuring pollution, or in many different aspects of pollution? What do these numbers mean, how do these numbers compare to those of the most pristine stream in the land, and to other streams that are said to be polluted? What location were these measurements made (Coldstream creek flows both into and out of Kalamalka lake)? Has Coldstream creek suddenly become polluted or has it always been polluted?

I frankly will not believe that Coldstream Creek is so polluted until I see some numbers and the details of how the measurement was made. The so-called pollution of Coldstream Creek is only one example of Environmental Hysteria. I do not believe the babblings of the monkeys in the zoo. I think the monkeys may get a temporary response to their wild statements, but in the long run the monkeys do more damage to the cause of protecting the environment than any good they will do with their unsupported statements.

So where is the data? V.E. (Vivian) Merchant
Ph.D., University of Waterloo, 1976

April 16 NONC Field Trip – Douglas Lake Circle Birding Tour

It was one of our warmest spring days to date and 11 of us set out driving a circuit from Vernon through Falkland and Douglas Lake Ranch to highway 5A, north to Campbell Creek Road and through Barnhartvale to Falkland and back to Vernon. Peter Blokker brought telescopes and we were able to use his expertise as well as the scopes to identify about 46 species of birds. We also saw 23 Kestrels on telephone wires along much of the route, and 14 Red-tailed Hawks and 6 Trumpeter Swans. There were immense flocks of varying ducks and many species of waterfowl. Some of the ponds and marshes before Douglas Lake were ice bound which we shouldn't have surprised us since the ice on Swan Lake has just recently disappeared!

We ate our picnic lunch at the Douglas Lake Ranch where we also saw Yellow-headed Blackbirds and at least 20 Hooded Mergansers and 2 Trumpeter Swans. Several of the marshes along the way had Muskrats busily swimming around. I think we all enjoyed the sun and scenery along the way as well as the good birding.

Present on the trip were: Gretta McDougall, Ann Davis, Robyn Thornton, Pamela Jenkins, Murray Freeman, Margaret Hubble, Peter Blokker, Melanie Christien, Jeff and Yvonne Spedding, and Daphne Manning.

Margaret Hubble

DEATH, TAXES AND PURPLE LOOSETRIFE

So the battle continued - what else is new? No additional occurrences of Purple Loosestrife were found during 2008 making it 5 years since the last instance.



Control continued satisfactorily at the 8 "lesser" sites remaining, many of which produced no weed and will soon be reaching their '5-years-clear' point. At the 4 problem areas stem removal totals continued high though with some cause for optimism. Along the productive airport site on Vernon Creek a flat was found where a nearby homeowner had been mowing creek side vegetation to provide a shaded sitting area by the



water. It is thought that cut stems have been washed down stream each spring when water level rises, effectively adding new plants annually. Along the Fulton section of Vernon Creek a collection of mature plants was found in a hidden location not investigated before; attention to both these occurrences in 2009 should have a beneficial effect on future weed spread.

Conditions in the field on Okanagan Avenue awaiting development remain unchanged. House building has been very active and creeps nearer however the current slowdown in real estate sales may delay operations at this site for several years.

Clearing at Kalavista Lagoon resumed with a modest program to isolate the main part of the infestation after a landowner managed to eliminate the biological agent introduced there for control. Oh well, no one said life would be easy.

Malcolm Martin

APRIL BLUEBIRD UPDATE: BLUEBIRDS STARTING TO NEST!

I was out on East Vernon Bluebird Trail with Gretta and John who are subbing for Bill at the moment while he recovers from a sprained ankle....AND we saw several pairs of Mt Bluebirds and 2 nest starts. One nest was completed with one blue egg! We were pretty excited.



I hope everyone is getting out and having some luck with nest starts too. Remember that bluebirds lay one egg daily and begin incubating when all eggs have been laid. This is also a time we monitors need to take care in checking the boxes if the female is actually sitting in the box.

But, many boxes had a couple of wasps building small nests. We scooped these out, however, I can see that wasps will be a bit of a problem. If you monitor weekly, you can probably keep on top of it and scoop the wasps out of the box with a gloved hand. There are other ways mentioned to help like smearing vaseline on the ceiling of the nest box or coating the ceiling with bar hand soap.

The second problem that many of you will have is house wrens. Try and keep your boxes 200 feet away from shrubs and underbrush where wrens like to nest and try pairing the boxes 10 to 15 feet apart in these areas and areas where swallows will nest too.

I now have 3 booklets to loan out on Bluebirds if anyone is interested.

Happy blue-birding!
Margaret

The Blue Bird Trail

This is a trail that had not been used for some time and we have revitalized it by cleaning and repairing old nest boxes and adding some new ones to replace destroyed ones. Marnie and Dolly will monitor this trail together over the summer months on a weekly basis. Each box is numbered and they will keep reports describing nest building activity, numbers of eggs laid, number of nestlings and fledglings. Some Bluebirds will have a second brood before migrating south at the end of summer.

Records are kept of all birds nesting in the nest boxes. Bluebird results are sent to the South Okanagan Bluebird Trail Society in Oliver, BC and they compile records from the Okanagan, Princeton, Merritt and William's Lakes area and then send them on to NABS, the North American Bluebird Society. NABS began in 1978 as a response to the declining numbers of Bluebirds.

In the 1850's House Sparrows were introduced from Europe and they aggressively took over Bluebird cavity nests often destroying the young Bluebirds. After starting a nest box program here in the 1980's, the Bluebird population in Vernon had increased significantly. However, in recent years with increased development in the hills surrounding Vernon, and loss of grassland habitat and Bluebird trails, the Bluebird population has dropped. We are hoping that by revitalizing and creating new bluebird trails we might again help increase the Bluebird numbers.

With Venture Training's help, NONC volunteers built 124 nest boxes this February. At the present time we have 19 Bluebird trails in the Vernon area with more than 40 NONC monitors looking after the trails and the nest boxes. Most of the trails have about 20 nest boxes, but one has over 50 and a couple have less than 12.

Other birds that compete for the nest boxes are Violet-green Swallows, Tree Swallows, House Wrens and House Sparrows. They are all very aggressive and will push Bluebirds out of their nest boxes. We don't mind sharing the boxes with Swallows as their numbers have dwindled over recent years. So, we will sometimes pair nest boxes within 25 feet of each other.

Bluebirds and Swallows seem to tolerate each other but not their own species. Also, Swallows are more aggressive and may help to discourage House Wrens from moving into the nest boxes. Male House Wrens have a bad habit of filling up several nest boxes with sticks and then allowing the female to choose the one she wants, leaving the other 2 boxes unusable!

Both Mountain and Western Bluebirds have been arriving in the Vernon area since about March 20th and several dozen Mountain Bluebirds were recently seen feeding on the grasslands of the Commonage. We watched one Western Bluebird pair as the male carefully inspected 2 separate boxes. He flew inside, he hopped on top and looked at the box from all angles, then flew below and looked up at the box from all angles! I'm not sure what his final opinion was!

From left to right in the photo is:
Margaret Hubble- co-ordinator of NONC Bluebird Committee
Marnie Williamson - trail monitor
Dolly Gehlen- trail monitor



CROCTALK LEARNING CENTRE

On Saturday, March 28, 2009 a small group from the North Okanagan Naturalist Club went to The Croctalk Learning Centre in Kelowna. It was a very informative and learning trip. Doug Illman and staff gave us an hour and a half talk on the crockadiles, turtles, African Wild Cats and tortoises from around the world. They are a rehabilitation facility for reptiles as well as a breeding centre for endangered subspecies. Doug and staff are total committed to the conservation of crockadiles through education. It was a wonderful experience. On the trip were Ann Davis, Pam Jenkins, Robyn Thornton, Lyn Smith and Gail Loughridge.

Jim Bodkin

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Margaret Hubble

Niskonlith April 23 09

On the trip schedule, it suggested a walk among the magnificent spring flowers with Pam, and that's exactly how it was. We stopped at the Adams River band office across the bridge in Chase, where we each paid \$5.00 to hike on the reserve. There were some osprey nests on power poles as we drove up to the brow of the hill above Niskonlith Lake. Slowly walking among the abundant lilies. we also saw many more yellow bells than I've noticed before, spring beauty, mertensia, chocolate tips, and other lomentiums. To get there we took the Salmon River Road and returned by the Pillar Lake route.

On the trip: Murray Freeman, Wendy Hooke, Pamela Jenkins, Vivian Merchant, Lil Williamson



Pamela Jenkins

BIRDATHON: How about marking Sunday, May 17th, a day to go out and look at birds? The Birdathon is run by Bird Studies Canada..it is the oldest sponsored bird count in North America. Margaret Hubble and Peter Blokker are going to do it. What a good idea for others to go out and 'do their thing' too? You get sponsors to give you any amount they like, or a lump sum; the Club receives 25% of the total taken in. A group could cover the City, or do a smaller section. Any amount is welcome. Give it a try???? Let us know.

Kay Bart

North Okanagan Young Naturalists Club Update – April 2009

Well, spring is here (maybe) and with it comes tons of new opportunities for the Young Naturalists to explore out of doors. My co leader Joan Cooke and myself are looking forward to the new season, and doing our best to help instill an appreciation and love of nature in the kids even in today's technological world. We are glad that it is a priority for so many parents even on busy family weekends.

Our membership has increased to sixteen families, which represents about twenty kids! We have gained several new five year olds, but also several older children,, which balances the group nicely.

Our most recent Explorer Day was a marmot observation day at Allen Brooks Nature Centre and celebration of the sixth birthday of the Young Naturalist's Club. Marnie Williamson handled the questions about marmot and bluebirds, and we were lucky enough to spot a very lengthy specimen of gopher snake which obliged us by s-l-o-w-l-y moving toward the safety of his hole so that all the kids had a good look

During the winter months, we visited the Bishop bird sanctuary and had a good day with Erin and Leanne Nelson. Later in the winter, we built and decorated bird houses from kits donated by Home Depot, snowshoed at Sovereign Lakes with Tim Jackson and learned about blue herons at our local heron colony with Ray Arlt.

We have an exciting roster of events lined up for the next few months. Next month, the Central Okanagan Regional District is teaching a "Pond Study" for us at Kaloya Provincial Park in Oyama. We hear there are beavers and a bald eagles nest to observe nearby as well, so it should be a wonderful day. Judy and Peter Stockdale have offered to host another Explorer Day at their organic farm in June for a scavenger hunt and demonstration of their border collies working with the sheep. Search and Rescue is presenting an outdoor survival program called "Hug a Tree" to the children in June.

At our last Explorer Day, we recognized Sarah and Emily Liscombe for their participation in sixty Explorer Days over the years! I hope many of our club members will go on to join the adult club in the coming years.

Thanks to all the volunteers who have given their time and energy to help our club provide fun and varied experiences throughout the year!

Kathy Smith

A NOTE FROM SALMON ARM; Some of our long-standing members will be sorry to hear that one of the Shuswap Naturalist Club's outstanding members, Mary-Lou Tapson-Jones, died last week. There will be a special meeting to be held at the Hayney House in Salmon Arm, June 28th at 10:00 a.m. You are welcome to attend.

NEWSPACKET COVER; The photo was taken by a friend, Hertha Pospischil of the Coldstream. She looked out of her window one morning and saw a small pygmy owl. It was sitting on a tree branch, holding a House sparrow in his claws. (Mid April). About a week later, early in the morning, she went out to fill her three bird feeders and there, again, was the owl sitting on the ground about a foot away from her foot, holding another House sparrow. She said the owl and she looked eye to eye and then it took off to the same

tree and just sat there, holding the bird. A Stellar's jay was circling around and around so the owl finally took off with the sparrow.

Kay Bart

Swan Lake Reserve – Activities to date

In 2005 Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) and Greater Vernon Services (GVS), with provincial funding and substantial donations from the North Okanagan Naturalists' Club (NONC) and Bishop Wild Bird Foundation, took title on 125 acres of the Anderson's property at the south end of Swan Lake to create a nature reserve around BX and Swan Lake Creeks, and provide public recreation. NONC became responsible for the environmental stewardship of the property. Livestock were removed from the property, but haying continued. Work started on BX creek clean up, and weed control.

In 2006/07 surveys were conducted on the bird and animal populations, and the tree/plant inventory was updated. Further work for the year included weed control work parties, tree and shrub planting along Swan Lake Creek, clean up of BX creek and debris and fence removal. The haying lease was continued in specified areas.

In 2007 the wildlife survey was concluded and data compiled for future reference. Tree and shrub planting continued, enhanced by a scheduled watering program and maintenance work parties. A certain number of trees and shrubs were "nurseryed" at John Baumbrough's farm on Old Kamloops Road ready for next year's planting. DUC installed 2 sign floats in positions specified by NONC off the shore of the reserve.

A pedestrian bridge over BX creek was designed and built by NONC, and several work parties were organized for weed control.

Haying continued on the site within areas marked out by DUC, and a drain water diversion near the highway overpass was enhanced as part of wetland development.

In the fall it was agreed to allow the Salmon River Enhancement group to harvest willow cuttings and limbs from trees along BX creek. This was concluded without affecting the existing habitat.

During the summer a few tent campers had to be moved off the site.

In 2008 the piling supports for a bird blind at the mouth of BX creek were installed in the spring by DUC, and the structure was completed by NONC members in the fall. The tree and shrub-planting program resumed, along with watering and maintenance.

All plantings so far are concentrated in the riparian areas in a manner that will cluster mixed native varieties that will provide shelter, forage and a breeding environment for existing and historical species. In the spring Venture Training supplied nesting boxes for swallows and small songbirds and these were put up in the fields and along BX creek.

DUC supplied 3 more "Nesting Area" signs that were installed by NONC along the east perimeter where most of the public access the site.

Printed signs were put up along BX creek to discourage campers, but still some campsites had to be cleared during the summer.

NONC members repositioned and repaired the sign floats, and anchored loafer logs for the birds and turtles off the shore at the mouth of BX creek.

BX creek has been prone to overflowing its banks, so it was decided to build up the flood zones with sand bags this year to keep more of the main flow within the creek banks during spring runoff. This was not successful as we had an exceptionally heavy runoff and the midsection of the creek was completely inundated leaving some fish high and dry.

In April we had our first school class attend with their science teacher from Grade 7 at Silver Star school, assisted by NONC members.

The weed and grass growth was exceptional this year, and GVS contracted for a road maintenance flail mower to open up the tree planting areas so that our volunteers could access for watering.

Right: Various ducks enjoying the winter in the drainage pond



2009 has started off with the transfer of the balance of the well tended pines and alder from John Baumbrough's farm to Swan Lake, and a field inspection with GVS to determine the route and construction method of a trail along the south side of BX creek linking the perimeter farm road with the bird blind. Prior to construction of the trail the banks will be built up to provide protection of the trail over a marked section, allowing uncontrolled spring flooding on the north side of BX creek, and controlled flooding on the south side. This allows a seasonal wetland area to be created as it has in the past. Any upgrading of the creek flow will be coordinated with the City's upstream project.

At the last meeting with GVS the following plan was agreed for the year:

- A walking trail to be built along BX creek to the bird blind via the NONC bridge.
- Access from the Old Kamloops Road to be finalized with the Anderson family, and work to begin on fencing, etc. to delineate the reserve access route and road surfacing.
- GVS and DUC to conclude their operating agreement.
- GVS will hire a contractor to mow the tree planting areas to facilitate tree watering and maintenance.
- Activities on the reserve will be restricted to walking trails, wildlife viewing, education and a picnic area. There will be no sports fields and no dogs will be allowed. The final plan is still being developed by GVS.

It is estimated that about 1000 man-hours have been put in by mostly NONC volunteers since the property was purchased, not including the committee's meetings.



We have received Donations from Kal Rotary for tree and shrub planting, FBCN (BC Nature) for the construction of the bird blind and Tolko Industries for trail building. There is also a small reserve for habitat development left over from individual private donations. A break down of each year's expenses can be found in the committee's annual financial report.

NONC is promoting standards of conduct in the reserve at this stage of development and advises NONC members as follows:

- Motorized vehicles are prohibited except when needed for work programs or guided group visits. Vehicles entering from the Old Kamloops Road should park on the south edge of the Stawn's Honey entrance away from the buildings, or on the right hand side of the farm road on the hill overlooking the reserve. The gate at Stawn's Honey may have a chain across but this should not be locked, and is in place as a deterrent until public access is formalized. The gate at Stickle Road is locked and is only used for work project access. Access from the highway overpass is extremely dangerous and not permitted – this is on Ministry of Highway's property. Some signage has been installed by GVS and more will be added.
- Walking of dogs is to be discouraged, but, if encountered, NONC members should advise the public to keep dogs on leash and on the farm roads. Any disturbance of wildlife is to be reported to the NONC committee for follow up. Once the reserve/park is better established and controlled NO DOGS will be allowed on the site. In the meantime temporary printed notices will be put up by the committee.
- The establishing of a walking trail along the south side of BX creek over the bridge to the blind will also result in the protection of the delta and "beach" area. It is intended to place a "soft" barrier at the old fence just north of the bridge to guide people away from the delta and along the formal trail to the blind. The trail to the blind itself will be rerouted to the east of the "construction" trail to minimize disturbance as people go back and forth, and allow the cleared shrubbery to re-establish around the blind.

The NONC Swan Lake Committee:

Lyll Webster
 Bill Image
 Kay Bartholomew
 Ray Arlt