

North Okanagan Naturalists' Club
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NEWSPACKET

January-February 2010



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**North Okanagan Naturalists' Club
(NONC)**

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North Okanagan Naturalists' Club



NEWSPACKET

January-February 2010 Issue Vol. 38 No. 1

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Articles and illustrations of natural history, and news and event notices are welcome. Copy should be delivered to Harold Sellers, Editor, e-mail hikerharold@gmail.com

OUR COVER THIS ISSUE

A Northern Hawk Owl, photographed north of Lumby by Jim Bodkin, during the Annual Swan and Eagle Count.

NONC NOTES

by Kay Bartholomew, Secretary

Christmas was a great time to hear from some of our far-flung members who wished to be remembered to the Club.

Doug Walkey, our President 1984 to 1986, lives in California somewhere near Fallbrook. Doug maintains an interest in what is going on in the Club so I tell him about the bird count, etc. He does some birding.

Phil Ranson phoned from Williams Lake. He was our President 1990 to 1993. He is a great birder, some of you will remember his humorous writings for 'Newspacket'. Phil would like to come back here..perhaps. He is retired. Said he wondered why he bought an expensive pair of snowshoes but hasn't seen any snow yet. Good point!

I had a great chat with Rob Cannings who is in charge of the entomology portion of the Provincial Museum in Victoria. Rob is the senior brother to Dick and Syd Cannings who are prominent in birding circles in B.C. and the country. Rob was recently awarded the Bruce Naylor Award at the Houses of Parliament in Ottawa. We have added this to the records in 'Newspacket' as it is a wonderful 'picture' of James Grant who was a founding member and one a lot of us will remember. Actually, he was our mentor!

CLUB CHRISTMAS PARTY

Wednesday, Dec. 2, 2009

by Kay Bartholomew & Joyce Hebbert

Another great evening was held on Dec. 2nd! Sixty of us paid \$5.00 to Ann at the door and brought along a huge array of 'finger food'! You ARE generous!

M-C for the evening was John Mackenzie who has a great sense of humour and plays various musical instruments. Thanks to him all was a great success.

Tables were decorated by the Lodge, but we added our usual place mats. Paper and pencils were added so everyone could take part in the table game which was to write a limerick about Christmas! Table No 1 (that was us!) managed to create some form of verse.

Tw'as the night before Christmas, poor Santa was sick;
The nine listless reindeer were not feeling quick;
But the boomers from Aussie arrived just in time
To take round the presents to kids down the line.
(Simple but fun)

Papers were also on hand for the 'lotto' game which created a lot of noise. Members were to find people who fitted a certain description; i.e. sings in a choir, born in Vernon, etc. There were 25 spots. This certainly caused a lot of commotion, almost to yelling! Robyn Thornton won this one.

We then had a visit from the 'Chorealis' choir, a

group of eleven who sang a cappella, including medieval music. It was beautiful.

The closing entertainment was 'The First Annual Christmas People Count', a skit performed by Silly Nilly Secretary Bird (Joyce Hebbert), Curious quizzical Quail (Hylda Mayfield), Peaking



Peacock (Jim Bodkin), and Blue-footed Booby (Bob Hebbert). The four colourfully costumed winged creatures entered, parading and bird-calling to the music of The Chicken Dance.

The skit proceeded with the spotting of many interesting and sometimes 'strange looking species', gathered at the NONC Christmas party; a warbling Robin, a Swift, a pair of lovebirds, a turkey, a rare Blue-Kay, and, of course, a table full of invasive species (from England). An unusual pair of peculiar punners and a double-medaled ice skater, who had flown in for the Winter Olympics, were also spotted. All the findings were checked by Quizzy, in her Who's Hoot of the Okanagan reference book.

After 20 minutes of antics, the feathered four declared they were hungry, and they headed off

to Briteland's Bistro for a feast of raw peanuts and sunflowers after singing their Christmas People Count theme song:

Pack up all our cares and woe
Here we are, on the go.
Count those people

Where the species wait for us
Hope they don't make a fuss
Count those people

We just want to spot and do some naming
With binoculars so carefully aiming.

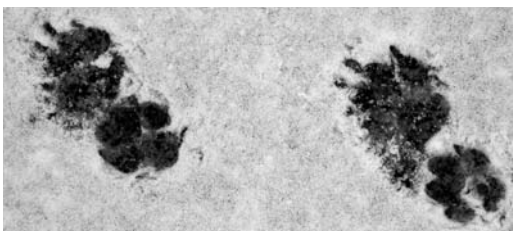
Make our list and send it in
Hope we've got enough to win.
People – hold still!!!!

OBSERVATIONS

Tracks in the snow



Raccoon Tracks



One-year-old Pet Dog

The tracks on the left are those of a raccoon. The claws are essentially in line with the feet. There is only occasionally any sign of a pad on the foot. The tracks on the right are those of our pet dog, a terrier-cross. The pads on the feet are clearly visible, and the claws extend from the foot at a variety of angles. The photographs were taken at the Mill Creek Strata in Vernon.

Vivian Merchant, January 2010

CALENDAR

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

Bird Watching Outings:

February 7th & 13th

February 21st & 27th

March 7th & 13th

March 21st & 27th

Meet at Performing Arts Centre at 9:00 am.
Peter Mayfield 549-8478

Fri., February 26 - SINGALONG NIGHT!

If you like to sing, or just to hum along,
This is the month for our winter sing along.

Mark the 26th, the last Fri-day;
The time is 7:30; the place will be at Kay's.*

If you want a night to make your spirits soar,
Join us for some singing, for food, for drinks,
for MORE !

You might ask what's the MORE? Well,
that's the mystery.
Just come and join the fun, and then you'll see!

*Kay's address: 2908 23rd St.
Contact Joyce Hebbert: 542-2302.

Saturday, March 27 - Knox Mountain & Mission Creek Greenway birding and moderate hiking. Bring a lunch. Meet 9:30 am Priest Valley parking lot. Contact Robyn Thornton 549-2714.

Saturday, April 10 - Alpaca Farm Tour, Oyama area. Cost \$7 each. Bring a lunch. Will do some birding as well. Meet 9:45 am Priest Valley parking lot. DEADLINE Monday, April 5th. Contact Robyn Thornton 549-2714.

SWAN LAKE NATURE RESERVE

by Lyall Webster

In the October 2009 newsletter Bill Image mentioned the start of work on a channel and pond on the south side of BX Creek, within the nature reserve. This work came about as part of the City of Vernon Upper BX Creek Watershed Improvement Plan. In mitigation of disturbance to portions of the creek, habitat restoration had to be provided and was to take the form of the pond and channel mentioned above. In consulta-

tion with Ducks Unlimited Canada, the owners of the land encompassing the nature reserve, it was decided that the south side of BX Creek near the footbridge would be a suitable place. This area generally floods each year and the pond would provide for some flood control and enhance habitat for ducks and other wildlife.

The pond work is now substantially complete except for the landscaping which will be done this spring. The pond measures approximately 250 feet by 100 feet and has a maximum depth of 9 feet. Golder & Assoc., the consultants, asked for suggestions for the required riparian planting, we provided them with information on trees and shrubs which we have had success with in our plantings to date. Also, DUC has made some requests on planting as it affects bird nesting.

We have also offered help on maintenance of the plantings, watering, etc. The existing irrigation system installed for us by GVS could easily be extended to the pond area.



We are very pleased with this addition, a real asset to the Nature Reserve. A nature pond was included in the concept plan from the start as a feature of the reserve (and at no cost to us). In the future it will be an important part of any education and interpretation plan. It will tie in well with the trail work on the south side of the creek which we hope to start in 2010.

The photo, looking NW towards BX Creek, was taken in early December. The pond was frozen over, with some snow on it.

Photo: January 7 2010, Swan Lake Nature Reserve, by Lyall Webster

SWAN AND EAGLE COUNT

by Jim Bodkin 250-545-7455

1) The North Okanagan Naturalists' Club held a Swan and Eagle count on Sunday, January 10, 2010. No Golden Eagles or Tundra Swans were seen. Overall, we counted 63 adult and 25 juvenile Bald Eagles and 94 adult and 18 juvenile Trumpeter Swans...that includes 4 swans seen flying over Okanagan Lake, not specifically identified, but included under Trumpeter adults as being most probably what they were.

2) Area H, Vernon to Sicamous, had their highest numbers ever with 41 adult and 19 juvenile Bald Eagles and 67 adult and 14 juvenile Trumpeter Swans. The large numbers of swans are attributed to the large areas of open water found, compared with colder years.

3) Area J, Coldstream to Lumby and the south end of Mabel Lake, had more swans than eagles for the first time. The eagle count was down due to poor visibility caused by thick ground fog in the Lavington-Lumby areas that extended almost as far as Mabel Lake. The swan count was enhanced by a Mabel Lake resident who keeps tabs on the swans and shares his results with us. This is a great help since we lack direct access to the lake and have to rely on what we can see from just a few lookouts along the road. This group saw 3 adult and 3 juvenile Bald Eagles and 8 adult Trumpeter Swans plus 4 juvenile Trumpeters as reported by the resident.

4) Area K, Enderby to Kingfisher to Mabel Lake saw 7 adult Bald Eagles and 4 adult Trumpeter Swans, not a particularly good year for this route despite the good visibility.

5) Area N, Vernon and area, results are:

a) Head of Okanagan Lake, 5 adult and 2 juvenile Bald Eagles and 11 adult Trumpeter Swans

b) Commonage and Vernon Arm of Okanagan Lake from Carr's Landing around to Canadian Lakeshore estates, 3 adult and 1 juvenile Bald Eagles supplemented by the 4 reported, but not truly identified, probable adult Trumpeter Swans

c) Northern portion of Kalamalka Lake, 4 adult Bald Eagles. A juvenile is known to frequent the area but was not seen on count day.

As usual, everyone reported an enjoyable day and I expect we are looking forward to next year's count. Phil Jones was on the Vernon to Sicamous circuit and I'm glad he got to enjoy record numbers this year...a true "Swan Song" for his passing the count co-ordination along to me.



The 'Bird-of-the-Day' was probably a Northern Hawk Owl seen on a power line along Mabel Lake Road not far from what everyone calls Pig City [pictured above]. If one of our photos turns out well I will forward it to our local paper, The Morning Star, for publication consideration along with a brief write-up of our North Okanagan Swan and Eagle Count. ❖



Northern Hawk Owl, courtesy Rob McKay
<http://calgaryphotographerrobmckay.com/>

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

The Vernon Christmas Bird Count was held on Sunday the 20th of December in far from ideal conditions. Wet snow, mixed with rain fell virtually all day. In between, fog obscured the view.

Our count was down in species, but not in number of individual birds.

The list:

12 Common Loon
8 Pied-billed Grebe
43 Horned Grebe
4 Red-necked Grebe
442 Western Grebe
6 Great Blue Heron
12 Trumpeter Swans
965 Canada Goose
3040 Mallard
1 American Widgeon
4 Canvasback
28 Redhead
26 Greater Scaup
8 Common Goldeneye
11 Barrow's Goldeneye
16 Bufflehead
2 Hooded Merganser
31 Bald Eagle
6 Northern Harrier
7 Sharp-shinned Hawk
5 Cooper's Hawk
67 Red-tailed Hawk
15 Rough-legged Hawk
5 American Kestrel
5 Merlin
93 Ring-necked Pheasant
1443 California Quail
1086 American Coot
2 Wilson's Snipe
23 Ring-billed Gull
2 California Gull
161 Herring Gull
2 Glaucous-winged Gull
453 Rock Pigeon
324 Mourning Dove

4 Great Horned Owl
1 Northern Pygmy Owl
1 Barred Owl
1 Belted Kingfisher
10 Downy Woodpecker
5 Hairy Woodpecker
175 Northern Flicker
3 Pileated Woodpecker
14 Steller's Jay
14 Clark's Nutcracker
324 Black-billed Magpie
325 American Crow
218 Common Raven
230 Black-capped Chickadee
80 Mountain Chickadee
8 Chestnut-backed Chickadee
83 Red-breasted Nuthatch
18 White-breasted Nuthatch
51 Pygmy Nuthatch
2 Winter Wren
3 Marsh Wren
6 Golden-crowned Kinglet
9 Townsend's Solitaire
65 American Robin
5300 Bohemian Waxwing
12 Cedar Waxwing
3 Northern Shrike
2790 European Starling
1 Spotted Towhee
7 American Tree Sparrow
98 Song Sparrow
22 White-crowned Sparrow
648 Dark-eyed Junco
266 Red-winged Blackbird
359 Brewer's Blackbird
49 Pine Grosbeak
3 Cassin's Finch
1020 House Finch
67 Red Crossbill
12 Common Redpoll
59 Pine Siskin
224 American Goldfinch
2 Evening Grosbeak
960 House Sparrow

This was the 110th Canada-wide count and for

Vernon the 60th! Forty-four people took part, in addition to 12 feederwatchers.

A total of 81 species were found, which is lower than most years, though the same as last year (when we also had lousy weather!).

The number of birds (21,000) was at least as high as most years, mainly because of the vast numbers of Mallards and especially Bohemian Waxwings. Several huge flocks of the latter were seen and were likely underestimated.

The number of Western Grebe, found by Don Cecile on Okanagan Lake, is also very unusual for this time of year.

We had some spectacular misses: Wood Duck, Golden Eagle, Killdeer, Three-toed Woodpecker, American Dipper and Varied Thrush can usually be counted on, but could not be found.

The Barred Owl, found by Ray Arlt and his party, was voted bird of the day and Ray got to take the trophy home. Runner-up were the large numbers of Western Grebes seen by Don Cecile and the McLeans.

Many thanks to all participants and especially to Erin and Leanne Nelson for their hospitality for the post count wrap-up!

Peter Blokker, compiler

BRUCE NAYLOR AWARD: THANK-YOU

Rob Cannings
Royal British Columbia Museum

27 October 2009
Speaker's Reception Room, Centre Block,
Houses of Parliament, Ottawa

[This is] a speech I gave upon receiving an award recently. It contains a little story about Jim Grant's influence on me as a boy and his encouragement of my youthful interest in insects and science in general. I thought you'd like it... And maybe others in the Vernon area who knew that wonderful man would also like to read it.
- Rob Cannings

Madam President, Alliance members, ladies and gentlemen, mes chers amis:

Bonsoir. It's good to be here in Ottawa this evening surrounded by natural historians and other friends.

I sincerely thank the Alliance for honouring me with this year's Bruce Naylor Award. I'm truly delighted to receive it. I never met Bruce, but I wish I had. My good friend John Acorn, an Alberta entomologist and paleontologist, knew him well. When I asked John recently about Bruce he said: "Bruce! A great guy... a bit quirky, a very careful paleontologist and a damn good biologist. He was a great guy!" I'm sure I would have liked and admired him.

Also, to my many colleagues across Canada and around the world, and especially at the Royal BC Museum, where I have worked for 30 years, thank you for your help and friendship. My thanks to Pauline Rafferty, CEO of the museum, and her predecessors, for their support. To my wife, Joan, also a Royal BC Museum natural history colleague, thank-you for everything.

Tonight I'd like to tell you a personal story. You'll be happy to hear that my wife made me promise to keep it short!.... It's a story that illustrates a critical function of a museum biologist's life – helping a kid; passing the torch.

Jim Grant was an extraordinary naturalist and professional entomologist in BC's Okanagan

Valley, where I grew up. He was a great friend of my father and, from an early age, I considered him a friend and mentor. His encouragement was one of the main reasons that I became fascinated by insects in the late 1950s. He had the delightful habit of dropping by our house in Penticton with entomological treasures. Once he brought me the first Monarch butterfly caterpillar I had ever seen. In BC this is a very rare species and, to a young BC insect enthusiast, this iconic caterpillar was pure gold. Jim left it at our doorstep one summer day.

I raised that butterfly patiently and my Dad and I photographed it through the various stages of its growth. I still use some of those pictures in slide shows today. A camping holiday intervened during the pupal stage and I carried the jar the whole way. To my relief, the adult emerged the day after we got home. Then came the big moral dilemma – to let the butterfly go or put it in my collection. I had grown attached to the insect over the weeks that I'd raised it; killing it seemed a really bad idea. And Monarchs were rare in the Okanagan, so letting it go was sensible. But I knew I would probably never catch another, and I desperately wanted that specimen. In the end, the collecting urge triumphed. With considerable guilt, I carefully added the butterfly to my collection. And, as Jim taught me was critical for all my specimens, I made a label listing all the collection information and pinned it with the butterfly.

Now before coming to the Royal BC Museum, I was curator of the Spencer Entomological Museum at the University of BC. Dr. Walter Lazorko, a retired psychiatrist and expert amateur beetle researcher, frequently came to work in the collection. Walter was a tall, distinguished European gentleman, always in suit and tie. He was a character, usually rather morose and pessimistic. He had been through a lot. Among other things, in the chaos of the spring of 1945 he had smuggled his huge beetle collection across war-torn Europe from Ukraine

to Austria and, from there, brought it to Canada. An amazing feat! One day, while we were lamenting the state of amateur entomology in BC, he started talking about his pal, Jim Grant, my old Okanagan mentor.

“There should be more people like Jim”, said Walter, “He always encouraged kids – there would be more young entomologists if more of us were like Jim!”

Walter could get excited in a gloomy sort of way. “Why,” he went on, “once when I was on a collecting trip with Jim at Penticton, way back about 1960, we found a Monarch butterfly larva on a milkweed plant... Very rare. Jim said, ‘I know a young boy who would love to have this.’ Jim and I drove a long way up to this boy’s house but he wasn’t home, so we left the caterpillar in a bag attached to the door handle.”

Walter’s story stunned me. The caterpillar on the door was a family legend. “Walter”, I said softly, “that young boy was *me*.” Walter was even more flabbergasted – almost disbelieving. After a long silence, tears ran down his cheeks and he said with conviction, “You see, then you were a small boy and now you’re an entomologist -- that’s what Jim did for you!” Of course, an exact cause and effect is a little far-fetched, but both incidents – the caterpillar on the door and the lunchtime conversation in the museum – have stayed with me.

Later, when I was president of the Entomological Society of BC, I helped create an award for the best graduate student paper delivered at our annual meeting. We call it the James Grant Award in honour of Jim’s dedication to inspiring kids, to passing the torch.

All this is to say that a small act can go a long way in stimulating the quest for knowledge in children and adults alike. I hope that we all can do this, more and more, in our own museum work. ❖