

NEWSPACKET

S E P T E M B E R - O C T O B E R 2 0 1 7



Visitors to the North Okanagan this Summer

A young Badger was photographed by Faith Clark near her Vernon home.

A Great Egret spent a few days at the Swan Lake Nature Reserve, to the delight of several NONC members. Claude Rioux captured this shot.

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When a Bird Makes Your Home Its Home!

by Jack VanDyk

In early May I noticed some small birds flying under the roof of our deck, and identified them as Flycatchers.

After checking around I found a nest under construction on top of a floor broom mounted against the wall, under the soffit and roof of our deck. I was able to take a picture and asked Peter Blokker to identify exactly what I was looking at. After explaining about the nest location he immediately knew it was a Pacific-slope Flycatcher, and after seeing my picture he confirmed this. Apparently PSFL are known to use human-



made structures to build a nest.

It looked like the nest was finished on June 3rd. When seeing this bird on the nest June 6th, I was able to check the nest after the female left for

a short while, and confirmed two eggs, one small and one a little bigger. It was hard to make out because the nest is only 6" below the soffit, I had to use a small mirror while standing on a chair.

One egg hatched around June 18 or 19 and about one week later I saw the young bird moving around.

When I saw the bird I realized that the profile did not match that of a flycatcher. So I took a picture and this confirmed to me that I was looking at a young Cowbird.

On July 1st this bird fledged and I was able to take a picture just beside the deck as it was being fed by two adult birds. Parasitism in Flycatchers is not uncommon, probably at least 5%, according to Peter. Nevertheless I was not expecting this to happen here. So it came as a surprise to say the least of not seeing some tiny Flycatchers emerge. It sure was very disappointing, but at the same time educational. I mean, what are the odds of witnessing something like this?

When checking the nest after the birds left I noticed one tiny egg, that one of the Flycatcher, as it had not hatched; most likely not fertile. When I did take the egg out for a picture one of the Flycatchers took a dive at me that surprised me, this bird had not been on the nest for several days so I thought she might be attempting another brood.

After two more days I took the egg out and kept watching for the bird to return but nothing happened. Cowbird egg hatches in 10-13 days and the Flycatcher's in 14-16 days (sometimes even longer). Thus the Cowbird nestling has a head start of several days and soon dominates the nest.

It is very gratifying to see these birds choose to make our yard their home. The habitat close to the deck is a fairly thick understory of Saskatoon and Choke-cherry bushes with Mountain Ash and Prickly Rose below some pines, with two birdbaths close by.

It will be interesting to see if these same birds will come back next year. 🌍

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South Okanagan Trip

by Claude Rioux

IN early June, Claire and I enjoyed a trip exploring the southern regions of the Okanagan and here are some highlights of the trip.

Our first stop was at Robert Lake. The parking lot was under water, but that didn't bother the residents which were making the most of their extended lake.

The shore was full of Wilson's Phalarope, some swimming in circles to stir up tasty bits, Yellow-headed Blackbirds singing their tin-canny songs while wandering around our feet, Ruddy Ducks and a pair of mating Cinnamon Teal, that didn't seem to mind that they were putting on a show.



above: Wilson's Phalarope

Our next stop was Hardy Falls, but the trail was closed due to the high rushing waters. I had a feeling that it would remain closed for the season until the trail was repaired.

Next was Sun-Oka Park. Part of the trail was under water. That wasn't a problem with water-shoes and shorts. We enjoyed watching a family of Common



Mergansers cruising along the shore with mom giving the kids a piggy-back ride [*above photo*].

The next stop of Day One was Vaseux Lake. We were glad to see that the boardwalk was still above water and surprised to find that a new 3-level observation blind was in place. Very nice. The area was full of bird song, but the birds were elusive.

We crossed the highway to watch the swifts soaring along the cliffs and were treated to the sight of a herd of Mountain Sheep with their young.

The next 3 days were spent exploring Road 22, Mahoney, White & Green Lake and the road to Kilpoola Lake before heading home via Osoyoos and Hwy 33. Along the canal on Rd 22, we spotted Bobolink popping up and down and chasing each other across the fields.

On our way home, we were happy to once again see the Lewis' Woodpecker in the Anarchist Mt area, but missed the Williamson's Sapsucker in the wood lot. Something to look forward to next year. 🌍

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Hummingbird Conference Held in Vernon

by Gail Loughridge

WE had a wonderful Hummingbird conference the weekend of May 19-21 in Vernon. Everyone on the team worked really hard to make this a successful weekend.

We had 33 people attend, coming from as far away as Pennsylvania and Fort St James, where they do have hummingbirds. We did have beautiful weather and that was a bonus.

We had two banding sites we used, one outside of Lumby and one on the west side of the Okanagan Lake.

We caught all three species: Calliope, Rufous, and Blackchin.

We had a BBQ at our house on Friday night which gave everyone a chance to mingle, renew old acquaintances and make new ones.

We want to thank NONC for the generous donation of \$200.00. It was a fun weekend. — Gail Loughridge and the Vernon banding team. 🌍



photos by Claire Christensen & Gail Loughridge

The afternoons were spent inside at People Place, digesting much information on hummingbirds and their ecology.



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NONC NATURAL HISTORY 2017: Lichen

Malcolm Martin shares another of his short natural history stories.

IS it the better technique for living things to be flexible and changeable, or is there more success in being stable and unchanging? Take lichens please.

Forever, it seems, they have been almost a symbol of stability, practically monolithic in habit. And yet last year something happened that rocked lichenologists back on their heels and set their blood racing.

Ask a naturalist what a lichen is and an answer will come that they are two differing organisms living in harmony to their mutual advantage.

right: example of horsehair lichen

Now it should be asked whether this is unfailingly so. There have always been unsolved problems for curious researchers to ponder.

Why, for instance, was a brown 'horsehair' lichen collected and carefully prepared for the table by aboriginal peoples of his area, when what appeared to the untrained eye to be exactly the same thing growing elsewhere, was shunned for being inedible?

In scientific despair, last year two lichenologists decided to compare both species exhaustively by carefully removing all the fungus DNA from both specimens and then also deleting all DNA derived from the alga partner. In this way they should end up with absolutely nothing remaining.

Surprise! They were met by a small collection of alien cells that turned out upon study to be from a yeast. When this news was flashed around the world, lichenologists of all colour and creed leapt to



their feet and started similar studies on species in their home area. Surprise again. Not all carried a yeast partner, though around 50% did. Probably this detective work continues to this day to find a reason for the disparity. No doubt more breaking news can be expected.

It seems two is company but three, if not a crowd, is at least reason for a party. 🌍

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2017 NONC Field Day

Saturday, May 13th

by Harold Sellers

ONLY 19 people showed up by 9:30 am at the Kal Beach parking lot.

We divided into three groups. Harold led Botany for 5, Norbert 7 for Hiking and Peter 7 for Birding.

From Kal Beach we set off in our cars, with some car-pooling. Harold went to Sunset Properties, off Eastside Road, for the botany walk on an old trail that goes uphill from a dead-end on Kokanee Road. Twenty-nine species of flowering shrubs and plants were spotted.

Peter's birding group went to the Swan Lake Nature Reserve. Flooding of the low land prevented the group from walking most of the trails, but they still managed to see 30 species, including Snow Goose, many Savannah Sparrows, and Cinnamon Teal.



above: birding group at Swan Lake, photo by Charlie Peti

Norbert took his group to the Red Gate of Kalamalka Lake Provincial Park. They spent about two hours

hiking the trails and reported seeing many wildflowers and several species of birds.



above: botany group takes a break, photo by Harold Sellers

Seventeen participants then gathered for lunch in the sunshine at Coldstream Park. This park was unfamiliar to quite a few and is largely undiscovered by the public, but it's a beautiful, peaceful place to enjoy a picnic. The creek was swollen and rushing by, but the day was so nice we skipped using the picnic shelter and sat in a circle on the grass.

After enjoying our lunches we shared what we had done and seen on the walks. After a brief while socializing and resting, we all set off for home, thankful that we'd had an opportunity to enjoy nature on such a gorgeous day. 🌍



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Highlights of the BC Nature AGM

Lillooet, May 4-9, 2017

by Pam Jenkins

THERE were about 150 people attending including four from Vernon: Peter, Marnie and Paul and myself.

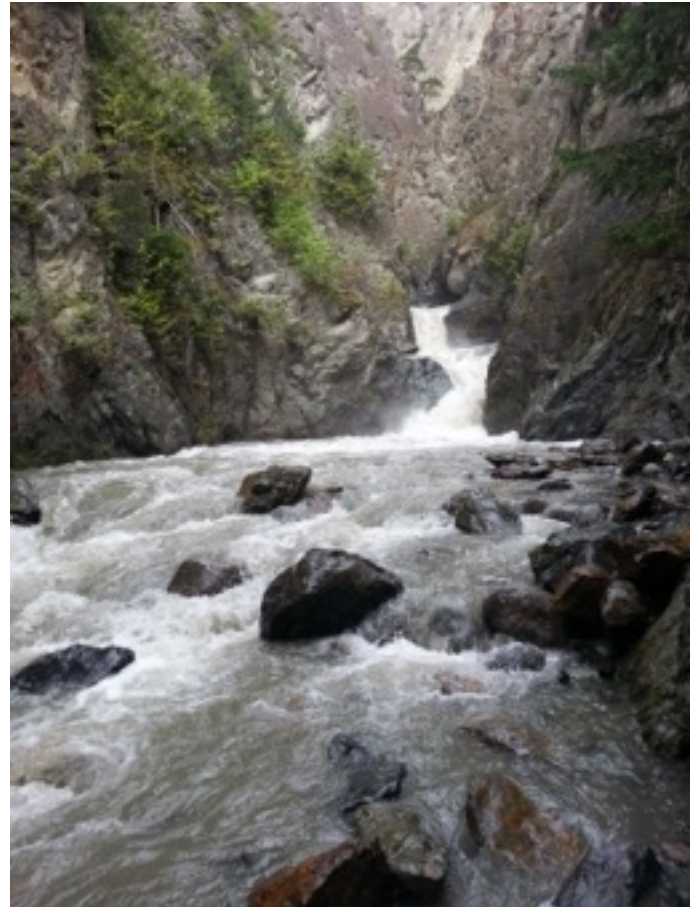
Rain and landslides had caused flooded fields and rushing muddy waters in many places. Snow slides had blocked the Duffy Lake Road. Some attending from the coast had had to backtrack to Vancouver then drive the Fraser Canyon route arriving a day later.

Lillooet is a small place so meetings happened in different locations. A welcome to pick up registration packages, have some food and meet others was held at a recently established winery North of town. I got to the Thursday afternoon Directors meeting held at their Rec Centre.

BC Nature has to increase member or family memberships by \$2.00 each, because last year the expenditures exceeded the revenue. Our bylaws need to be updated by 2018, and FGMs will become as important as AGMs. That is, similar business can be done at both meetings.

Friday was a field trip day with no meetings. It rained a lot. I had got on a trip for only the first 20 to apply, to ride the train shuttle from Seton Portage back to Lillooet. We met early on Friday morning at the train station. A small bus picked us up. We drove along the Bridge river valley to the Carpenter Lake Dam, stopping to look at cliffs and formations as the river twisted its way through the rock walls.

We crossed the dam, then drove up Mission Mountain as the rain got heavier.



In clouds at the top we did not see much. Seton Portage is quite a bit lower than Carpenter Lake. BC Hydro channels water from Carpenter Lake through pipes to their powerhouse on Seton Lake.

It was still raining, but below the cloud cover, when we met a First Nations guide who welcomed us by singing and playing a drum. He then told us how we have not respected or cared for the land.

Some chose to walk to Seton Portage and up Whiteman Creek to a campsite with a rotunda, where lunch was delivered. A few of us walked up to the

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Lillooet AGM continued

falls on a narrow rocky trail. After eating we walked to the train station.

The train did not come. The leader walked back to a hotel to make a phone call. The train had been stopped by another slide, so it was back on the bus. The train tunnels under the mountain, so we did see more using the bus both ways.

The winery again provided welcome refreshments and the evening presentation at the Rec Centre was by biologist, Jared Hobbs, called Grasslands- Whispers in the Wind.

I had to miss early morning birding on Friday because of the elected train trip, but did go on the Saturday birding trip to Seton campsite and park. Saw a goat on some cliffs and many birds: Townsend's, Black-throated grey, Yellow-rumped and Wilson's warblers, Peregrine Falcon, Osprey, Chipping and White-throated sparrows, Warbling Vireo, Steller's Jay, Virginia Rail, Spotted Towhee, various flycatchers and lots of other birds. There were at least eight different birding groups each morning.

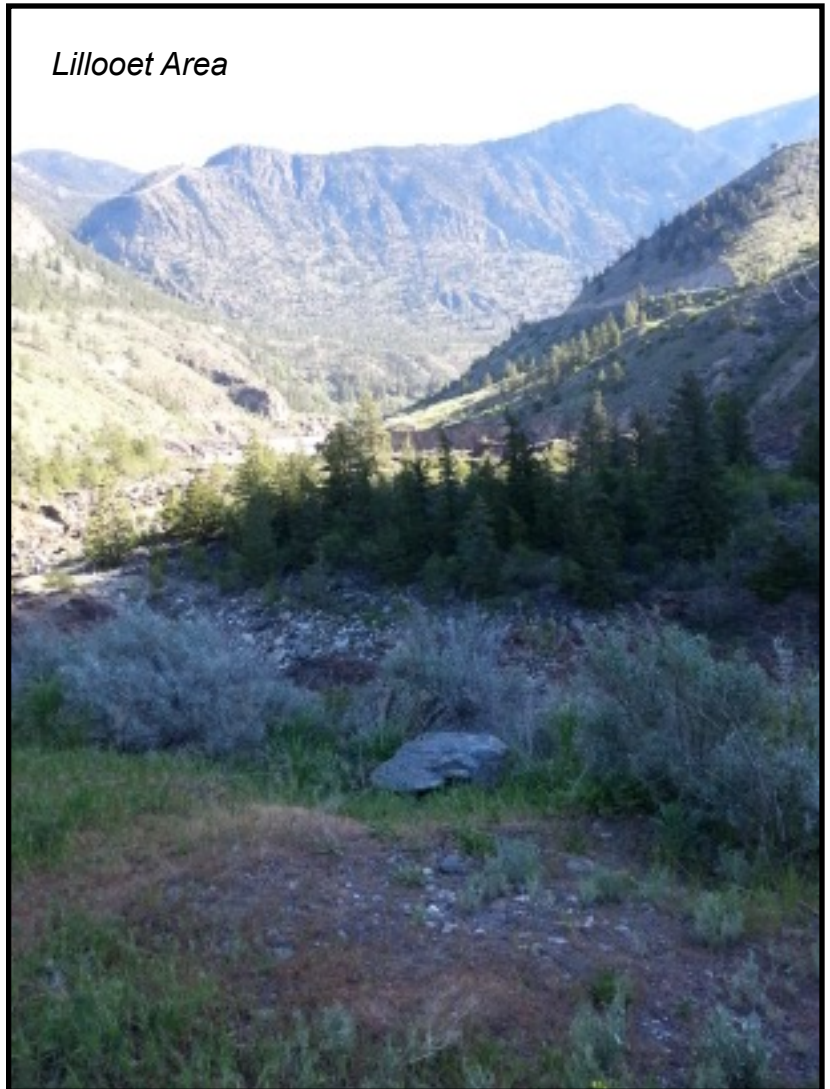
Saturday was spent at the Xwisten Bridge River Indian Band hall along the Bridge River Road, past their ancient fishing grounds at the junction of the Bridge and Fraser rivers. We were welcomed by band members and with more drumming.

The first presentation was by Gerald Michel, Lands and Resources Coordinator for the Xwisten, followed by biologist Larry Davies, talking about fishers. He was followed by biologist Richard Weir

on wolverines. Both these species are suffering declining numbers because of habitat loss, which is human caused.

The AGM followed in the afternoon. BC Nature is planning more camps this year.

Lillooet Area



The evening banquet was held at a curling rink. The speaker was naturalist Dr. Ian Routley, with a presentation of Lillooet Flora and Fauna. It also included mountain hiking pictures. 🌍

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Why Don't Some Warblers Nest Farther West?

Maybe It's Just Too Tough to Get There

by Kathi Borgmann

May 18, 2017

Reprinted from www.allaboutbirds.org

A flip through the range maps in any field guide shows blocks of color indicating where a species spends its summers, winters, and points in between. But why does a species occur where it does? What limits its range? People have debated this idea for at least a century—the field even has its own name, “biogeography.” And recently David Toews, a postdoctoral associate at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, added a new idea to the list.

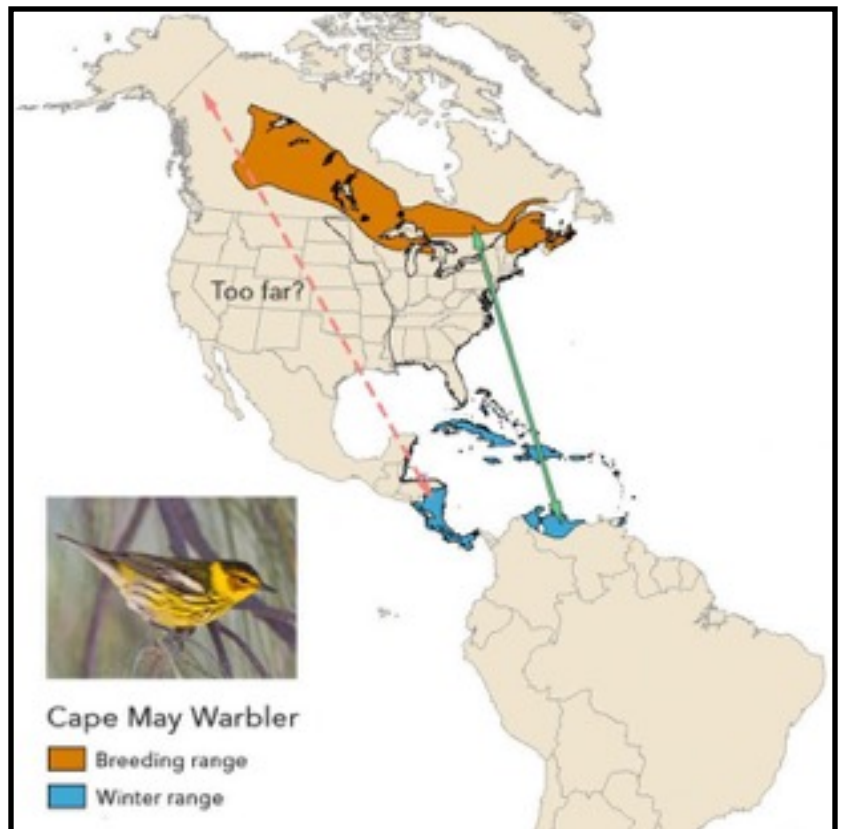
Toews looked at the ranges of North American warblers and noticed an interesting pattern. More than half of these brightly colored songbird species breed in the boreal forest, where they take advantage of an incredible abundance of food during the summer months. Stretching from eastern Maine, straight across Canada and into Alaska, the boreal forest supports an estimated 3 billion birds and is often called North America's bird nursery.

Yet even though the boreal forest offers more than 1.2 billion acres of habitat and lots of food, some warbler species use only part of it. Cape May Warblers, for example, forage and nest in spruce and fir trees, which occur across the entire boreal forest. But good luck seeing a Cape May Warbler west of Alberta, Canada. “Those places, particularly in the summer, are just jam-packed with food,” Toews says. “So

presumably those would be, at a very superficial level, good habitat for these birds.” If the right kind of habitat is there, why don't they breed there?

To explore this age-old question, Toews took advantage of the biggest citizen-science dataset on birds available. He used eBird data to look at where people reported 17 warbler species from Newfoundland to Alaska. Four of the 17 species occur all the way across, but 13 species mysteriously stop partway. Wondering if perhaps some aspect of the forest habitat was different in western Canada and Alaska, Toews looked at land cover data and climatic variables for the entire boreal forest. The results backed up his impression: appropriate habitat does exist in northwestern Canada and Alaska, even though the birds themselves are nowhere to be found.

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Farther West continued

Toews thinks the answer might have less to do with the right type of habitat and more with migration distance. For a Cape May Warbler that spends its winters in Central America and the Caribbean, flying to eastern Canada takes a lot of energy. But it takes even more to reach far northwestern Canada. That extra distance might just be too much for these tiny birds. In other words, the cost of migration might limit their breeding range.

Blackpoll Warblers, on the other hand, are super migrators; they fly more than 1,800 miles one-way from South America to Canada and breed across nearly the entire boreal forest from east to west. So why can Blackpoll Warblers make the distance while other warblers can't? "The how and why we really don't know," Toews says, "but the ability to store and use fuel efficiently if you are moving long distances can be a pretty important limiting factor." Maybe Blackpolls are doing something different that Cape May Warblers, for example, can't do, "the idea being that there are tradeoffs with some of those adaptations."

Perhaps Blackpoll Warblers are just migration overachievers—not really comparable to other species. But there's still the case of the Northern Waterthrush, Toews says. It winters in Mexico and Central America and nests across the entire boreal forest. Unlike the Cape May Warbler, the Northern Waterthrush winters in western Mexico. Individuals wintering there can fly straight north to western Alaska, keeping their total travel distance down to something manageable.

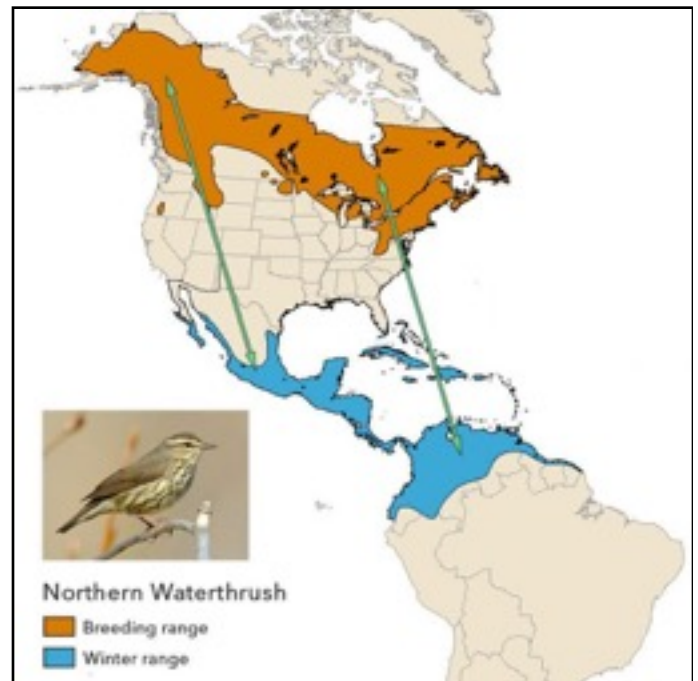
They're not migrating any farther than Cape May Warblers, they're just starting from a different location, and using the Pacific Flyway, a migration

corridor that runs up the western edge of the continent. "While there isn't a perfect one-to-one tradeoff between distance traveled and how far north a bird can breed," Toews says, there are other navigational barriers and costs that may keep those other 13 species he studied from reaching northwestern Canada and Alaska.

Toews' new proposal joins a number of previously suggested explanations for why species have range limits, including competition among species, geographic barriers such as the Rocky Mountains, and physiological limits such as a bird's ability to cope with temperature extremes. "I definitely don't think that we know the exact answer," Toews says, "but it's a different way to think about range limits in birds."

Reference

Toews, D. P. L. 2017. Habitat suitability and the constraints of migration in New World warblers. *Journal of Avian Biology* 48:001–010. 🌐



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North Okanagan Naturalists' Club (NONC)
P.O. Box 473
Vernon, B.C. V1T 6M4

Website www.nonc.ca

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NatureKids	Marnie Williamson 545-4743

PROGRAMS & ACTIVITIES

Contact the following if you have questions.

BC Nature	Pam Jenkins 545-0490 (sub) Peter Blokker 545-8297
Birding	Peter Blokker 545-8297
Bishop Wild Bird Sanctuary	Aaron Deans 542-5122
Bluebird Trails	Margaret Mackenzie 542-2712

* Okanagan Collaborative Conservation Program

LIFE MEMBERS

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

* deceased

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Copy for publication should be sent to Harold Sellers, Editor, by e-mail hikerharold@gmail.com.



North Okanagan Naturalists Club



#NorthOkNature

MONTHLY MEETINGS

On the first Wednesday of the month (September through May), we hold a meeting for members and visitors at the Village Green Hotel, Sierra Room II. 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. Annual dues are \$35 for an individual and \$50 for a couple or family.

Name(s): _____

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