

March 2007



*We are "Dedicated to
Promotion and Protection of
the Natural Environment."
The Kamloops Naturalists
are affiliated with the
Federation of BC Naturalists
and with the Canadian
Nature Federation.*



SAGE WHISPERS

Newsletter of the Kamloops Naturalist Club
www.kamloopsnaturalist.ca



This Hooded Merganser was photographed by Ralph Ritcey. It captured second place in the Animal section of the Spring category of the the annual KNC photography contest.

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Coming Events

KAMLOOPS NATURALIST CLUB

Mailing Address:
PO Box 625, Kamloops,
B.C. V2C 5L7

MEETINGS
7:00 pm, the third
Thursday of the month
from September to
June. Meet at Heritage
House, 100 Lorne St.

KNC Newsletter is published every month except for July and August. Editor: Susan Weilandt susanweilandt@shaw.ca Telephone 851-2802. Please request contribution guidelines if unfamiliar with such. **Deadline is the end of the first week in every month.**

Annual Membership
(Jan 1st to December 31st)
Family \$35, Individual \$25
Contact: Gordon Campone
Tel: 374-1509

ART CREDITS: All line drawings in this issue courtesy of the **Artist, Robert Savannah**, for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife.

KNC Programs

March 15: Michael Blackstone will be talking to us about water.

April 19: Holly Campbell of the Agricultural Land Commission will be giving this evening's presentation.

May 17: Tanya Luszez of Partners in Flight will be giving a presentation.

June 21: The KNC annual picnic. Details to come later.

Field Trips and Community Calendar

March 18, Sunday: Birding Trip on the South Thompson River to Chase. Come and see the first bluebirds of the season on a drive along the north side of the South Thompson River to Chase. Meet at the Valleyview Turbo station near Convergys at 8:30 AM to car pool. Bring a lunch. We will bird until we reach Chase at around 1 PM. The leader is Eric McAlary.

March 27, Tuesday evening: Owling in the Lac du Bois, McQueen and Pass Lakes area. Meet at the north shore Fortune Shopping Centre, A & W parking lot at 8:30 PM to car pool. Dress in warm clothing and footwear. The

outing will last for two to three hours. The leader is Willie Haras.

March 28, Wednesday: Outdoor Kamloops lecture. **Frances Vyse** will give an introduction to the geological history of the Kamloops area. Meet at TRU in room S375 in the Science Building at 7 PM.

April 4, Wednesday: Outdoor Kamloops lecture. **Mary Ellen Grant** will give an overview of the species of wild mammals to be found in and near Kamloops. Meet at TRU in room S375 in the Science Building at 7 PM.

April 11, Wednesday: Outdoor Kamloops lecture. **Andy Raniseth** will provide an overview of all the reptiles and amphibians found in the region. Meet at TRU in room S375 in the Science Building at 7 PM.

April 18, Wednesday: Outdoor Kamloops lecture. **Willie Haras and Eric McAlary** will give an introduction to wild birds and how to identify them. Meet at TRU in room S375 in the Science Building at 7 PM.

April 25, Wednesday: Outdoor Kamloops lecture. **Alan Vyse** will speak about the many trees to be found in the Kamloops area. Meet at TRU in room S375 in the Science Building at 7 PM.

May 2, Wednesday: Outdoor Kamloops lecture. **Karen McLaren** will speak about wildflowers. She will discuss the fragile grasslands and the types of plants to be found there. Meet at TRU in room S375 in the Science Building at 7 PM.



Meet Your New Executive

President - Tom Dickinson



Tom is a biologist at TRU who moved to Kamloops in 1989. He has been involved with the Kamloops Naturalist Club since arriving, and has represented the club on the LRMP since 1992.

Vice-President - Percy Hébert



Percy has been an Assistant Professor in Biological Sciences at TRU since 2001, and a member of the Kamloops Naturalist Club since 2006. He has conducted research on a variety of birds, including the Marbled Murrelet, Mountain Bluebird and Herring Gull.

Secretary - Carol Morgenthaler



Carol has been a member of the Kamloops Naturalist Club for 5 years. She retired from broadcasting in Smithers, where she was a member of the Bulkley Valley Naturalists. Her main interests are birds, flowers and preserving natural habitats.

Treasurer - Anne Neave



Anne has been a resident of Kamloops since 1970. She has supervised a Blue bird route for 6 years in Aberdeen Highlands Park and later on Goose Lake Road, dragging kids and friends along to help out! Her interests are butterflies, flowers, bats and astronomy.

Newsletter Editor - Susan Weilandt



Susan is a biologist who moved to Kamloops with her husband and three kids in 1995. She has been a member of the Kamloops Naturalist club for four years. In addition to being the club newsletter editor, she has also represented the club on the LRMP.

Director - Ellie Hill



Ellie grew up on a farm in Saskatchewan. For many years she worked as a registered nurse. Now she is enjoying early retirement and watching birds.

Director - Bob Scheer



Bob retired from BC Parks in 2004. His interests are photography, travel and radio control modeling. He also serves on the executive of the B.C. Grasslands Conservation Council.

FBCN Director - Connie Lagace



I am a 6-year returning resident of Kamloops, after living in Salmon Arm for 19 years. I am concerned about our global warming and its effects on our planet. I want to do everything I can to help resolve these issues, and want our young people to realize how they too can change what is to come of our earth.

Membership - Gordon Campone

Director - Andy Raniseth



FBCN Report

I attended my first FBCN regional meeting in Kelowna on Saturday, March 10 with Margaret Graham.

Joan Best wants to step down as chair of the awards committee. If anyone in the club is interested in holding this position, please let me know. It would also be great to have someone that is craft oriented who could make the awards. There is an award fund available for compensation of materials purchased.

Boat operators have now banned the dumping of gray water in the Shuswap Lake. Dumping of gray & black water is all to be done at the houseboat headquarters in Sicamous.

Rose Gunoff of BC Parks was at the meeting and gave a speech. She told us that 15 million dollars has been put into the 8 regions in BC for upgrades to the Parks. Marketing will be high on the list to encourage attendance in the parks not only in summer but utilizing the other seasons as well.

I mistakenly reported at the last meeting that Eva Durance was up for nomination for an award. She was actually nominating Harold Baumbrough for the Education award.

Lisa Scott of WiTS (Wildlife Tree Stewardship Program) was also on hand and gave a talk about the program. They currently have 3 regions, Vancouver Island, Lower Mainland and the Okanagan. They are actively recruiting volunteers in the Okanagan region for monitors. If you are interested, please contact me for information.

We have good news; it looks like the roofed accommodations in BC Parks is not going ahead, although the Mt. Robson (summer only) area is still being looked at. We are asking all members and

clubs to send a letter saying we oppose this happening in our Parks. The Coal fired electrical generation proposal in Princeton has been dropped for now.

We briefly discussed the Beetle kill trees, and should we leave them, burn them, or leave some? This will be taken into consideration at a later date.

Mountain Caribou has received so much response we are happy to say that the government is now leaning toward habitat preservation instead of predator control. I have a newspaper from the Shuswap Market that has an article in it pertaining to this and loss of use by snowmobile clubs and their concerns.

Registration for the AGM in Vernon to save \$10 is fast coming to an end. The registration form is in the last BC Nature. Get them in soon. Okanagan Camp is being held at the Morning Star Bible Camp right after the AGM, located on the west side of the lake, running from May 6-11, 2007. The AGM in Penticton for 2008 has been confirmed to May 29 thru June 1, 2008. It will be held at the Penticton Lakeside resort. The FGM is being held at Harrison Hot Springs Sept 30-Oct 3, 2007.

Connice Lagace

FBCN director



A Few Notes on Early Migration and Nesting.

Waterfowl

The first Northern Pintail showed up at a Cinnamon Ridge field on February 16th. That was followed by a lone Gadwall and couple of pairs of American Wigeon on the 18th. Waterfowl numbers at Tranquille Pond have increased recently, with at least 12 swans (Trumpeters?), 150 Canada Geese, 10 American Wigeon, 90 Mallards, and 280 Northern Pintails there on the morning of March 6th.

Raptors

On February 17, Willy Haras saw a pair of Bald Eagles repairing their nest on Rabbit Island across from McArthur Island, and on the 25th, Rick Howie saw a female Great-horned Owl sitting on her nest at Knutsford.

On a North Thompson trip, March 4th, Tom Dickinson saw 19 Bald Eagles, most of them immatures, near Barriere. He surmised that they were part of a migration. That may be the case, because the eagle gatherings at Tranquille calving grounds are now over, with calving nearly completed there.

Shorebirds

Andy Raniseth saw Killdeer at McArthur Island on March 4th, but we have yet to see one at Tranquille so far this spring.

Passerines

A few Red-winged Blackbirds spend the winter around Kamloops, mostly around feedlots. However, Willy noted that they were increasing at his feeder in late February, so they are probably migrants. More puzzling was a report received by Rick of several of the birds at the Stake Lake parking lot (elevation 1,400 metres) on February 25th, where the snow was about 60 cm deep. A Western Meadowlark was sing-

ing at Tranquille on February 28th. Townsend's Solitaire and Varied Thrush visited our yard in early March after being absent for the winter. We are still (March 6th) searching daily, hoping to see a Mountain Bluebird or Say's Phoebe to let us know that spring is really here!

Ralph and Clara Ritcey

Housesitter Wanted

Secluded waterfront home on the Sechelt Peninsula is looking for a caretaker for a month to six weeks during summer, 2007. Two dogs come with the property, as well as a sailboat. This is an isolated spot, with road access via logging roads, but water access readily available. The site is "off the grid" with water supplied by a small stream, and power and lights provided by generators. The property is surrounded by mature forest and there are no immediate neighbours. In fact, no neighbours, period.

The owner is hoping that this opportunity for communing with Nature will entice someone who will so enjoy the experience that he/she/they may not even demand payment! However, if such is not the case, this can be negotiated. Applicants must be willing to learn, if they don't already know, the care and feeding of generators as well as the available indoor plumbing - and that situated outdoors - - not to mention the dogs.

Interested persons please apply, stating expectations, qualifications, etc., and requesting additional information, to the owner's sister, Joan Best, at the following addresses:

Email; jbest@mail.ocis.net
Regular mail; J. Best, 143 - 2960 Tranquille Rd.,
Kamloops, B.C., V2B 8B6
Telephone; 250-376-4814.



Red-tailed Hawk



The Red-tailed Hawk is the only *buteo* (a genus of large, broad-winged hawks) to be found year-round in Kamloops. Most of the red-tails we see in Kamloops during summer move south for the winter, but some arrive from the north to take their place. Spring migration is already on for this bird and sightings are becoming more frequent. Rick's checklist tells us they will be seen more often right into May.

Red-tailed Hawks are regular nesters around Kamloops and there is a well known nesting site on the face of 'Rattlesnake Bluff' on Ord Road. Twice in mid February we saw a 'redtail' flying along the upper face of the bluff, and Willie Haras sighted one there on February 24th. They have nested and produced young at the bluff for at least 15 years. However, last year we saw no young there even though the adults added new material to a nest of the previous year and were seen there quite often. The hawks may work on several nest sites before selecting one, so they may well have produced young elsewhere at the bluff.

The presence of a red tail will separate this species from other large, broad winged hawks although that field mark may not be present. Tails of some races may show no red in the tail, either on the upper or under surface. While this may pose a problem in identification, it may be overcome by assuming that any *buteo* that you see in winter that is not a Rough-legged Hawk, is a red tail.

The diet of Red-tailed Hawks consists of a great variety of small mammals, waterfowl, small birds and snakes. The hawks seize snakes near their mid sections, then kill them by pecking at the head. There is a record of a rattle-snake killing a red-tail and a study has shown that Red-tailed Hawks kill fewer poisonous snakes than expected by their abundance in the population.

Ralph Ritcey

Young Naturalist Club Report for 2005-2006

Wow, the past year has just flown by for the Young Naturalist Club of Kamloops. As a result of a difference in abilities and interests, we roughly split the children into two groups to create the Junior Explorers and Senior Explorers. This was somewhat complicated by families which had older and younger children. Some outings were for everyone and some were exclusively for the older or younger children. We found that this did make a difference when the activities involved more physical exertion. Many of the younger children are just unable to keep up (although there are some who never quit and even wear out the older ones).

Some of the most interesting activities this past year included looking for Bighorn Sheep, having a great deal of fun on snowshoes, and exploring the Rock and Mineral exhibit at the Kamloops Museum along with Christmas Cookies and gifts. An afternoon, dinner and evening at Paul Lake Provincial Park was a wonderful way to wrap up the season in June. Our attendance is always larger when food is involved! We had a great deal of fun exploring the park, climbing Gibraltar Rock, swimming, canoeing and eating. There were some very excited and creative map-makers for the treasure hunt, and we all enjoyed the nature quiz. As usual, the children have learned a lot and shared a lot with me over the course of the year.

With the support of the Kamloops Naturalist Club fundraising, the YNC has been able to get out and enjoy nature. Thank you to everyone who has helped to raise funds to support our cookouts and entry fees.

Susan Hammond



Ducks Unlimited Looking for Volunteer Birdwatchers

Would you like to spend a few of your mornings this spring in one of the most beautiful places in BC, right outside your backdoor? Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) is looking for volunteers to assist in its annual waterfowl ground survey program in the Lac du Bois Grasslands Park.

Since 1988, this survey program has been an essential part of waterfowl management in BC. The information gathered by our volunteers is used by DUC and Environment Canada to estimate the sizes of waterfowl populations, to track annual trends in their numbers, and to characterize the habitat types used by different species. So not only would you be participating in one of the longest-running wildlife survey programs in the province, you'd have the satisfaction of knowing that the data you collect are actively used for the benefit of BC's waterfowl.

At the same time, you'd be playing a vital role in some ground-breaking research at TRU. The bird data we collect this year will also be used in a joint TRU-DUC research project looking at the effects of cattle grazing on Interior wetlands. Since last year, two graduate students have been examining different aspects of wetlands in the park, including water quality, vegetation and aquatic invertebrate communities. The waterfowl information is being incorporated with these other data in statistical models which will be used to predict how different levels of grazing affect wetlands.

Finally, you'd have a great excuse (not that you need one) to spend even more time communing with Mother Nature and studying the diverse flora and fauna of the grasslands.

We carry out the surveys between April 26th and May 20th every year, and try to visit each wetland six times. Each survey route has 8-15 wetlands and can easily be

covered in a morning. All mileage costs are covered by DUC. Ideally, participants should have some experience identifying waterfowl to species and gender, and our biologists can provide some initial help getting you up to speed if necessary.

Several Kamloops Naturalists members have assisted us in the past and some will be participating again this spring. We couldn't run the survey program without these folks, and we are proud to have them on our team. While we encourage our volunteers to participate in successive years, even one season's commitment is welcomed and appreciated.

If you're interested and you've got some time to spare this spring, please call Bruce Harrison, DUC's regional biologist for the Interior, at 374-8307.

Bruce Harrison



Mallard Ducks



Celestial Fireworks

Unforgettable experiences may be a close encounter with wildlife, a glorious panoramic view from a conquered mountaintop, or a thundering Churchill River waterfall enjoyed from a canoe. But all does not cease when the heavenly orb sinks into the crimson west. Night brings on loons, owls and mournful wolf howls. Curtains of Aurora Borealis shift in gentle sways, while majestic meteors streak the sky. Occasionally, the later two perform far beyond our widest dreams.

One late summer evening I stepped out on our north-facing patio to behold an explosive northern lights display. These were not your usual placid sheet phenomenon, but the sky gone wild with green lights dashing about, with bursts that twist and squirm all across the northern hemisphere. In all appearance, mighty Jupiter was throwing a temper tantrum. I stood in awe, never witnessing such violence in the heavens! I later learned of an unusually huge solar flare engulfing the earth, generating this wild exhibit.

In late fall of 2001 I received an e-mail from an astronomy buddy in Courtenay, B.C. announcing the forthcoming Leonid Meteor storm on November 19th between the hours of 1 and 3 AM. This event occurs on a 33 year cycle when the earth passes through the Comet Tempel-Tuttle dust trail. Due to a predicted clear sky, no moon and a dust trail superloaded with comet debris, a thrilling exhibition was foretold.

For a vantage point, far removed from interfering lights and a wide angle view of the sky, I picked Mount Lolo, north-east of Kamloops and former location of CFS Kamloops radar site. It was part of NORAD's Pine Tree radar defence line operating from 1958 to 1988, with RCAF personnel manning the unit from 1962 until it closed.

Armed with a thermos of hot tea, I drove out shortly after mid-night and saw my first meteor make a 60 degree arc across Cold Creek Road. Reaching the summit, I was immediately entertained with major fireworks concentrated directly overhead and in the constellations Orion to the south-west, and Big Dipper to the north. Although most meteors passed from east to west, minor streaks were observed moving in all directions at less than three second intervals, and multiple simultaneous sightings were common. The overhead flight path displayed most of the long sustained firestreaks, while Ursa Major appeared least active, but the sky was in a constant state of motion, forcing one to continually swivel your head for fear of missing the granddaddy of all fireballs. It was a celestial war zone, minus the sound effects.

By two thirty my tea was gone, cold chill penetrated my very being, and although the firestorm was active, I retreated off the mountain viewing numerous major arcs as I guided the truck down Lolo and Cold Creek Roads. I have often watched meteor showers in late summer, but the Leonid storm was indeed one for the books.

Willie Haras



Brazilian Travels

On Nov. 3rd, Lily and I flew out of Kamloops headed for Brazil. Three planes and 24 hours later we were in our hotel in Sao Paulo ready for a nap (after first checking out the birds on the front lawn, of course). That evening, we took the shuttle to the airport to meet our companions for the tour, David and Rosemary Jackson from the U.K., and next morning were up at 6 AM to catch a flight to Cuiaba.

Flying in a plane where instructions are given in Portuguese can be interesting. When we heard the name Cuiaba we got off and went to wait for our luggage. Well, it didn't get off with us. Finally an attendant came over to see our tickets and immediately 'phoned the pilot. I couldn't understand what he said but I imagine it went something like, "Hold the plane, I've got four idiots who got off one stop too early". We were in Campos do Whatever, but they took us to Cuiaba anyhow. There we were met by our guide, Paulo Boute, a bus and driver, and 4 others who were to be part of the tour for the first week. It was a very congenial group – I've never seen a bunch of birders who got along so well.

That afternoon, we drove to Santa Teresa Lodge (posada, in Portuguese) in the Pantanal for a couple of days birding. And great birding it was! The Pantanal has a very high water table and every depression has a pool of water in it, but, to my surprise, there is a lot of forest in the area. In 2 days I saw 262 birds, so you can imagine how prolific the bird life was. On one river trip we fed Black-collared Hawks which came to Paulo's whistle and swooped down on the fish he threw into the river. Further upstream, the river otters mobbed us when we pulled into shore and happily fed on more fish. Paulo calls it the National Geographic system, as the animals almost seemed to be trained. After 2 nights at Santa Teresa, we drove up to a lodge so bad I can't even remember the name. Poor food, poor accommodations, but they did have Hyacinth Macaws. Consequently, there were about 50 people there although not all slept at the lodge (smart guys).

One downside to the high water table is the difficulty of sewage disposal. Consequently, there is a sign in the bathroom which says paper is not to be thrown into the toilet bowl, and a small bucket beside the bowl. Well, this is a difficult practice for many of us, and the rule is honoured more in the breach than the practice, I fear.

We next birded our way to Posada Serra Deserata to look for the Harpy Eagle. With a couple of spare hours, many of us went swimming in the pool which was fed by a small stream and had numerous small fish which entertained us by biting our backs as we swam. We got even by catching a few dozen and, with a unique Brazilian recipe, had a tasty hors-d'oeuvre. The meals were splendid as well. No luck with the eagle, though.



Rheas

Next, it was off to Posada Penhesco in the Chapada dos Guimaraes National Park for a couple of nights. This area is higher and cooler than the Pantanal – a great relief to us all. And we were allowed to put paper into the toilet bowl! With numerous waterfalls in the area, some unique birds (eg. Blue-winged Macaw and 2 new mannikins {yeah}) and 3 swimming pools at the lodge, we regretted we had to go back to Cuiaba on the morning of Nov. 11th, where our group split up. After a great churrascaria lunch we said our goodbyes (with lump in throat) and had a long, tedious drive through fields of sugar cane and sorghum (with some new birds, to be sure) to the Global Terra Hotel by the Rio Claro in the Amazon basin. What made this place fun was the family of Burrowing

(Continued on page 10)



(Continued from page 9)

Owls in the front lawn – 2 adults and 4 young. There are many Burrowing Owls in the area, all sitting on the tops of ant hills. Two nights later we moved to the Jardim dos Amazonia Resort, the best yet. Large rooms, great food and the best swimming pool of all. The pool is rock-lined with a gravel bottom and fed by a spring which then flows through some fish ponds (big fish) to the Rio Claro. We had a couple of productive walks (although heard, we just couldn't find the Screaming Piha though) and the owner of the resort took us on a boat-ride up the Rio Claro where we managed to find a unique bird - the Point-tailed Palm-creeper, the only bird of its kind in South America.

Nov. 14 sort of typifies our lengthy days: 6:30 breakfast, rather late for us, bird around the Jardim, long drive to Cuiaba, flight to Sao Paulo, and in bed by 10:30. Since this was a direct flight, we managed to stay on the plane for the whole trip.

Next day, we had a long drive to Posada Pica-Pau in Intervalles National Park where we would spend the next three nights. This gave us an opportunity to see the countryside of south-eastern Brazil – rolling hills with many farms and pastures (Brazilians eat a lot of beef), and lots of potholes where one can see such delights as Yellow-rumped Marshbirds and Blackish Rails. The hills are much like those around Kamloops but receive much more rainfall, so the vegetation is lush. Valleys also tend to be narrower.

Intervalles was rather damp but proved to be a very productive area for new birds. We would bird hard all morning, swim after lunch and bird again in late afternoon and early evening before retiring to our rooms about 9 or 10. With help from a local guide, we managed to see birds like Long-trained Nightjar, Giant Antshrike and Dusky-legged Guan. Who could forget them? There were also some very large insects and a lizard, the Puka, if I

remember correctly, which grows to about 6 feet long.



Lizard

Throughout the trip, large mammals were hard to see, but we did manage to spot Capybara (quite tame in the Pantanal), peccaries, some rat-like beast called a cavy, and a very rare porcupine. Signs of armadillo foraging were on many of the trails, particularly at Bacury, our next stop. If you want to know how nice Brazilians can be, hear this: on our way to Bacury on Nov. 18, Paulo spotted a bird in a field alongside a major highway (great eyes, he has) and pulled over. Since the bird was on the opposite side of the highway, Paulo spoke to one of the toll keepers (we'd just passed a toll booth) who stopped traffic so we could cross the highway to get good close looks at a Whistling Heron. Nice fellow.

Ken and Lily Taylor

To be continued. Look for Part 2 of Ken and Lily's trip to Brazil in March's newsletter.



River Otters

