
September 2018



Kamloops
Naturalist
Club

We Enjoy, Protect and Promote Nature



SAGE WHISPERS

Newsletter of the Kamloops Naturalist Club



**Gold Panning with
Indonesian Students**

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Coming Events

KNC Executive and Officers

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BC Nature Director

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Winnifred Fischer

Newsletter Committee

Lynne Borle

Programs

Justine Densmore-McCulloch

Margaret Graham

Bluebird Co-ordinator

Susan Weilandt

KNC Programs

Sept. 20 – John Karakatsoulis – (BSc, PhD), Senior Lecturer & Department Chair, Dept. of Natural Resource Sciences, TRU. Nepal, like many countries around the world, is experiencing an increase in forest fires from both natural events and from human caused ignition. Join John as we explore how this small and resourceful country is facing this challenge.

Saturday, Sept. 22 – Adams River Salmon Run.

Meet for carpooling at 9 a.m. at the corner of Oriole Road and Glenwood Drive. Dress for the weather. Bring a lunch or a snack and water. There is no need to register in advance. Everyone will be asked to sign an attendance form. Guests are always welcome. Non-club members will be asked to sign a day trip waiver form and pay \$1.

When carpooling, at trip-end, please offer the driver compensation for gas and wear-and tear on the vehicle. Consider offering what you feel would be fair if you had been driving that vehicle and would be receiving the compensation.

Oct. 18 – Masters of Science students in Environmental Science

Jackson Baron – Automating the Identification of Invasive Plant Species With Remote Sensing

Edyta Marcisz – Modeling and analyzing Thompson Region Bighorn Sheep connectivity between herds

Erik Prytula – The effect of weather variables on migratory timing in avian populations

Aramide Taiwo – Organoarsenicals: Fate and occurrence in water bodies near poultry farms

Nov. 15 – Jim Cooperman - Everything Shuswap – Environmentalist Jim Cooperman will be talking about his comprehensive, bioregional guidebook. He will focus on Chapter 3, Ecology, which examines the region's amazing diversity. Topics will include the protected ancient rainforests, endangered species and the fate of the salmon.



Kamloops Naturalist

The Kamloops Naturalist Club was formed in 1971 and became a registered Society in 1981. It is a member of the Federation of British Columbia Naturalists www.bcnature.ca and Nature Canada www.naturecanada.ca

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Meetings
7:00 PM, the third Thursday of the month from Sept. to June. Meet at Heritage House, 100 Lorne St., Kamloops, BC.

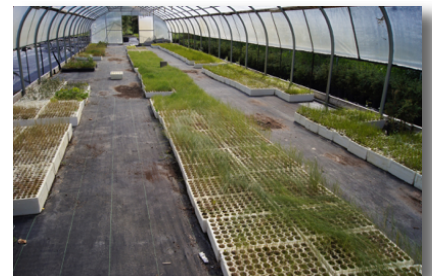
Annual Membership
(Jan. 1 to Dec. 31)
Family \$40
Individual \$28
Student \$23
Contact:
Winnifred Fischer
Tel: 250-376-3944

Splitrock Nursery, Lillooet

Jesse Ritcey

On the labour day weekend club member Jesse Ritcey was in Lillooet, BC with a group of Kamloops gardeners. He's sent along some photos of an interpretive garden located right at the entrance to the town center. The area is planted with a variety of native grassland species, including white heath aster, goldenrod, wild rose, sage, and more. An old turbine has been repurposed into a sculpture of a nodding onion. There are many signs teaching people about the plants, the community, and the history of the native people of the region (the Sekw'el'wás).

The plants were all grown in Splitrock nursery, located just outside Lillooet on Sekw'el'wás land. Jesse toured the nursery and learned that it was started five years ago by the Lillooet naturalist club, before being spun off into a band owned enterprise. It provides employment opportunities for the band and helps preserve knowledge about the traditional uses of plants. BC Hydro is an important customer that is working with the Lillooet naturalists and First Nations to address some of the environmental damage that's occurred from dam construction in the area.



Steve Cannings Award given to Rick Howie

Rick Howie was awarded the prestigious Steve Cannings award for contributions to ornithology in the province at the AGM of the BC Field Ornithologists, Hope, BC (June 1-3, 2018). He described the award as 'not only a surprise but an honour that will remain with me for a long time.' The award is named for respected naturalist Steve Cannings who was a personal friend of Rick's.



Rick Howie celebrating his big win with the
KNC executive.



Gold Panning Trips

by Margaret Graham

photos by Adele Stapleton and Lynne Borle

Several club members participated in a number of gold panning trips up Tranquille Creek this spring and summer with international students from Panama, China, and Indonesia. Frank Ritcey started these trips last year as a fund-raising project for the club as we receive money from TRU World for each student. This summer, we had 117 Indonesian high school students, ranging in age from 13 to 17.

The students are delivered to the parking lot at Tranquille Creek by small TRU buses. Each group is accompanied by a TRU liaison and 2 or more chaperones, depending on the size of the group which averages 12 to 15 students. A safety talk is the first order of business, discussing possible hazards to be encountered on the trail, including rattlesnakes, bears, cactus, and poison ivy. Everyone is advised to keep to the trail.

Along the way, stops are made to admire the faces carved into the trunks of some of the cottonwoods. After navigating the water along the path, the beaver dam is pointed out and a detour is made to view the lodge in the pond. A picture of a beaver is produced as well as a skull which shows the beaver's teeth. The students are suitably impressed by the beavers' ability to cut down large trees using only their teeth, some of which can be seen along the trail. Sometimes a frog or toad might be seen. Last year with Frank leading us through the sagebrush and amongst the rocks, some of the students were lucky enough to catch a glimpse of a rattlesnake. This year, they had to be satisfied with a rolled up skin with a rattle on the end which Ken shook to produce the rattle sound. One group of students spotted a garter snake swimming in the water while they were gold panning.

When we finally reach our destination by the creek, Ken or Adele will give a demonstration of gold panning – how to swirl the water in the pan and wash out the gravel until only black sand remains in the pan where the tiny flecks of gold can be seen. Pans of gravel are distributed to the students and soon they are arranged along the river, some squatting on the banks and others right in the river with their bare feet. Some of the students are very patient and keep swirling their pans and asking for new gravel until they find a few flakes of gold. This is collected with a pipette and squeezed into a small vial that they can keep as a memento of the trip. Shrieks of joy announce the discovery of gold and everyone wants to see the gold in the vial. Some of the students quickly lose interest and are busy with their phones, taking pictures of their comrades and the instructors.



Gold Panning Trips by Margaret Graham

With only 2 hours allowed for the entire trip, it is a real struggle to get the students out of the creek, shoes and socks on, and back to the bus waiting in the parking lot. All of the students seem to enjoy their gold panning adventure, even if they don't find gold. Thank you to the leaders and their helpers – Frank, Ken, Gary, Adele, Nancy, Jesse, Joy, Lynne, and Margaret who have accompanied the students up the creek. We have one more trip on September 21 when a group of 12 students from Japan will try their luck.



The all important Safety Talk



Does the face in the tree look like me?



Gary demonstrates the Beavers' jaw



A Columbian Frog almost as big as Ken's hand





Ken demonstrates the rattles of a rattlesnake



Jesse shovels gravel into the pans to begin the panning



There's gold in this vial!



Adele demonstrates proper technique



The students enjoying the creek and the panning



Gastromycetes: Stinkhorns

by Gary Hunt

The word Gastromycetes means “stomach fungi.” In this group, spores are produced internally in sacs that are more-or-less oval. Spores are not forcibly discharged as in the gilled mushrooms, but instead the outer membranes (the peridium) open with pores, or by disintegrating, and the powdery spores are released by wind, rain or animals. There are four types of Gastromycetes, excluding the truffles: puffballs, earthstars, bird’s nest fungi, and stinkhorns.

The stinkhorn fungi are surely among the most unusual and fascinating fungi that you can encounter. They are a very highly specialized kind of gastromycete and are distinguished by beginning as round, egg-like, gelatinous masses underground. A slimy, foul-smelling spore mass arises from the egg. A variety of odours, commonly described as cadaverous, putrid, disgusting, or like rotting carrion, attract flies and other insects. With spores adhering to their bodies, the insects are the agents of spore dispersal. It is somewhat analogous to the odor of flowers attracting pollinators but in a uniquely fungal manner.

With their odours that universally repulse humans, it may seem absurd to suggest that they can be eaten, but they actually have culinary value in some regions. The young underground eggs are odourless before spore development and are considered a delicacy in parts of China and Europe where they are sold as “devil’s eggs.”

They occur in a wide variety of habitats. While their greatest diversity and abundance is in the tropics, they are found world-wide and are common in landscaped areas such as greenhouses, gardens, nurseries, parks, lawns, and in wood chips. They were probably all originally distributed to temperate areas from tropical nursery stock.



Mutinus elegans egg



Clathrus archeri (Octopus Stinkhorn)



Clathrus ruber (Latticed Stinkhorn)



Our Members

Ralph and Clara Ritcey

Photo by Jesse Ritcey



To do justice to this couple would require an entire newsletter to itself! These long-time club members have so many memories and, both being still very much "with it" the better part of an afternoon was nowhere near enough time for an in-depth interview! It was remarked that keeping this particular Our Members article to one page was going to be difficult. In fact, serializing it might be an option!

Clara's father, Ted Helset, came from Norway in 1930 and settled, for a time, in Blue River. Clara, though, was born in Langly Prairie where her grandparents had settled and it was to their home that her mother, knowing her time was close, went to stay with her parents to await the birth as her own mother was a mid-wife. Although the local Doctor had been called, Clara couldn't wait for him so it was her grandmother who delivered her! The family moved again to "The Homestead" which was located in the lower part of the Clearwater valley. From there they moved to Hemp Creek where her father went into big game guiding. The isolation posed a problem, of course, with education for the children, though Clara did have a year of Grade 1 before the move. The only method, then, was home schooling. For a time, Clara and her brother, Roy, benefited from lessons taught by a neighbour's daughter who was, herself, taught via correspondence and knew the system. When that teacher left Clara's mother became the teacher. When Clara reached Grade 7 and Roy was in Grade 6, they had one year in a school down in the main valley and boarded there from Sunday evening to Friday when, after school, they walked the 8 miles back home!

For a voracious reader like Clara, unable to avail herself of the activities other children took for granted, books and the reading of them were her favourite pastime. Ralph remarked that he was amazed at how knowledgeable Clara and her family were. The author, Bruce Hutchinson, wrote an article about Clara's family for the Reader's Digest noting Clara's ability to speed read and, furthermore, to remember what she read. Ralph adds that the article was no exaggeration! The interest in reading may be one reason why Clara eventually turned author herself, publishing, with the help of her sister, Ellen, a book entitled "Pioneer women of the upper Clearwater" that sold out. A smaller book entitled; "Tales my Uncle Told me" included telling about a prospecting trip the uncle made, overland, through Wells-Gray park and on to Barkerville! In the works is another book, this one to deal with the stories both she and Ralph have gathered from all the wonderful old-timers they knew.



The Wells-Gray area had an added attraction to Ralph Ritcey when he was assigned to work in the park. Not to get ahead of ourselves, though; Ralph was born in Nova Scotia; an easterner, yet; who knew? Though born in Halifax in 1925, Ralph grew up in Kentville. When he reached age 18 he enlisted in the RCNVR (Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve) and served there for 2 years. His training there was as a radio operator and meant he learned Morse code. Training completed, he then joined a corvette, HMCS St. Lambert. After further training in Bermuda, his ship became part of the protective escort group attending Atlantic convoys bringing food and weapons to Britain. Life must have seemed rather tame after such hazardous times but Ralph had developed an interest in learning that led him to take 2 years at a McGill University subsidiary, Dawson College, studying subjects normally assigned to pre-med students. Something was still lacking so, like many others, he heeded the call; "Go west, young man, go west!"

This meant Trail, B.C., where he worked for one summer. While there he happened to come across a UBC calendar offering courses that would lead to a career in wildlife work and, best of all, that it was taught by none other than Ian McTaggart-Cowan who became famous as a "biological educator and conservationist" to use his own words. In 1950 Ralph and Pat Martin were both students at UBC and applied for a summer job that came open to do a wildlife survey in Wells-Gray park. This was to be a general survey as little was known about what wildlife there was in the park. In the summer of 1950, as a field assistant to P.W. Martin, Ralph began a career in wildlife management in Wells-Gray park. In the summer of 1951, with R. Yorke Edwards of B.C. Parks wildlife research section, they worked mostly with moose and caribou, garnering much information basic to the management of those two species. At that time Mr. Cy Oldham was head of Parks and was open to the idea of carefully managed hunting as part of the recreation offered in some parks. Fall hunting seasons of moose, deer, black bear and grouse are still open in much of southern Wells-Gray Park. A Nature Conservancy protects the rest of the park and hunting is not allowed there.

During the work in Wells-Gray Ralph and his colleague had suppers at the Helset family home and it was there he met Clara. Now married for 67 years, Ralph and Clara still get out birding and otherwise enjoying our great outdoors. They have 4 children; Susan, Mike, Frank and Bruce. Jesse Ritcey is their grandson. Susan's son, Aaron, is the 4th generation of the family to work in Wells-Gray park. Three more grandsons and 4 granddaughters and The Most Amazing GREAT Granddaughter ever, round out the family.

Ralph, along with Eric McAlary, Syd Roberts and Rick Howie, was instrumental in starting the Big Bird Day, now a Club annual event that draws many members skilled in recognizing birds to contribute to the list and to enjoy a get-together at a member's home afterwards. The Ritceys were regulars at Club meetings for many years and are Life Members in recognition of the knowledge and skills both contributed to the Club. We look forward to many more years of Ritceys in the Club!

Joan Best

