



SAGE WHISPERS

Newsletter of the Kamloops Naturalist Club
We enjoy, protect, and promote nature



"There are ... two species of rail that live in the cattail reeds that are very elusive, and if you are lucky, you can see both." p 4.

Quote and Sora photograph by Tristan Semeniuk



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CLUB INFO

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, and Nature Canada.

Sage Whispers is published every two months, except for July and August.
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Meetings

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

Annual Membership

(January 1 to December 31)
Family - \$40, Individual - \$28, Student - \$23
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kamloopsnaturalistclub.com
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MEMORIES OF TRANQUILLE

by Joan Best

Long-time club member Joan Best was inspired to post a brief article on the infoline after reading about the loon seen on Kamloops Lake.

Knowing how important Tranquille is to club members, I have included it in the newsletter for those who aren't on the infoline.

- Margaret Graham

Some of you have heard all this before but the post about seeing a loon on Kamloops lake and walking the tracks between the two tunnels brought on an attack of history! My father worked for the then Tranquille TB Sanitarium for 25 years from 1928 on. We four kids, therefore, grew up there. We lived on the Cooney property in what had been their cowboy and farm workers' shack as there was insufficient housing for families at the San.

Also, as there was a definite class system amongst the employees and given that our father was a common labourer; gardening, etc., and our location, we four were on our own. So we went hiking; everywhere within a hard day's hike of Tranquille we went, as children, on our own. From the lake in Lac du bois to Frederick, but our favourite was Cooney bay, up on Little Bluff which, at that time, featured a tunnel through it as the tracks were, then, single.

And so on up to Battle Bluff and beyond; all that territory was part of our back yard. But we walked along the tracks all the way to the Big tunnel numerous times. From one portal one cannot see the other but there is a side tunnel, built for safe exit, that allowed the view of the opposite portal being no bigger than one's thumb nail. In between there was a promontory where a fellow with about 24 dogs lived for years and just beyond the little tunnel there was a home for the track walker, a Mr. Bennett. He and his wife lived there 'til he either retired or was phased out and we sometimes met Mrs. Bennett carrying groceries all the way home from the Sanitarium grocery store! One day, from a perch on the Little Tunnel bluff, we kids saw something that made us hurry home to tell our mother that there were whales in the lake; we had seen a pod of sturgeon.

During the War there was an armed guard posted outside each portal. One lone soldier; brilliant! No, he would not allow even kids to pass. Sorry about going on here; I've been told I should write a book about what it was like growing up at Tranquille; well, there you go!

MAY BIRDING

Isaac Nelson



Yellow-headed Blackbird in McGowan Park

Spring has sprung in Kamloops as far as birds are concerned. Many species are already beginning to nest, while others are still migrating through on their way to breeding grounds further North. Yellow-rumped Warblers have arrived en masse, as have Western Tanagers, Chipping Sparrows, House Wrens, and several species of flycatchers. Keep an eye out for both Rufous and Calliope Hummingbirds, and one might be lucky enough to witness their spectacular diving displays. Belted Kingfishers appear to be nesting at Tranquille this year, and Lewis's Woodpeckers have returned to their usual breeding areas including Savona, Skeetchestn Valley, and Planet Mine Road near Stump Lake. Knutsford is also becoming alive again, with Mountain Bluebirds and Tree Swallows perched on every other fence post. Visit Lac du Bois (now open) or Knutsford early in the morning and you will likely hear a drumming Ruffed Grouse. Also look and listen here for the elusive and newly-arrived MacGillivray's Warbler which prefers the shrubby understory of the Aspen copses.



Mountain Chickadee nest in Aberdeen

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BIRDER'S GUIDE TO MCGOWAN PARK

by Tristan Semeniuk

Many of us enjoy the songs that migrating birds sing in the spring, and there is a large diversity of birds that call Gamble's Pond at Albert McGowan Park their home. In March, male Red-winged Blackbirds are the first spring birds to appear at the park, along with American Robins who magically pull worms out of the ground. Song sparrows arrive quite early as well, and you can see and hear them calling from the reeds and trees surrounding the pond. Western Meadowlarks are soon to follow with their beautiful songs.



Red-winged Blackbird

As soon as the ice on the pond thaws, many migrating waterfowl species come in, usually the beginning or middle of March, depending on the year. You can see Mallards and Canada Geese first in the beginning of March, and as the month progresses you can start to see American Wigeons, and eventually Redheads, American Coots, Lesser Scaup, Barrow's Goldeneye, and Ring-necked Ducks at the end of March. You can also start to see Dark-eyed Juncos, American Goldfinches, House Sparrows, House Finches, European Starlings, Black-capped Chickadees, Mountain Chickadees, Black-billed Magpies, sometimes Northern Shrikes, Northern Flickers, American Crows, Eurasian Collared-Doves and Killdeer.

Different raptors such as the Red-tailed Hawk, Northern Harrier, and Bald Eagle can be seen soaring high up or hunting in the nearby field. Sometimes Bald Eagles are seen dive-bombing ducks for a meal. Come April a few more waterfowl species arrive including Northern Shovelers, Northern Pintails, Green-winged Teals, Common Goldeneyes, Buffleheads, Hooded Mergansers, and Cinnamon Teals. There are a couple more species of blackbirds that start to migrate through as well. These include Yellow-headed Blackbirds and Brewer's Blackbirds. May is the best month for birding, as many species of warblers start to migrate through, as well as Western Tanagers. The first warbler species that migrate through are Yellow-rumped Warblers, and they are followed by Orange-crowned Warblers, Nashville Warblers, Wilson's Warbler's, and many more. There are also two species of rail that live in the cattail reeds that are very elusive, and if you are lucky, you can see both. The Sora and Virginia Rail tend to hide in the thick reeds and don't come out that often.



Virginia Rail

VALUING ALL VOICES

ADAPTATION CONFERENCE 2020

by Olivia Corke

In February, I had the extraordinary opportunity to attend the biggest climate change conference in the country: Adaptation Canada 2020, held in downtown Vancouver, BC. As one of the only youth in attendance, I felt incredibly honoured to have been offered this opportunity through my Next Generation Naturalists group that I've been a part of since last spring.

The morning of opening ceremonies I arrived with my group mentor, Jesse Ritcey, and two other fellow youth members, Amber Fill and Shekinah Jimenez. The main conference room revealed luxurious decor, professionals in suits, mounds of vegan snacks, and numerous well-known individuals such as Janet Austin, lieutenant governor of BC, and Per Espen Stoknes, author of "What We Think about When We Try Not to Think about Global Warming". Yes, this all sounds fantastic; however as a young, inexperienced naturalist I could not help but feel that my contributions would be meager compared to those around me (and maybe even fraudulent considering that meat still occasionally made it onto my plate). Regardless, I did my best to hide my trepidation.

The first day's sessions offered a wide range of expertise, which was encouraging. I learned about topics ranging from the importance of traditional Aboriginal practices, to the incorporation of innovative, green infrastructures, to the effects of climate change on small communities. Everyone present seemed to bring something different to the table like sections of a symphony contributing to a powerful performance. Though this was exciting to observe, I sometimes scrambled to comprehend the fine details concerning policies and statistics (trepidation rising).

“
I became suddenly aware of how valued my opinion was as a youth.

On the second day, however, I experienced a turning point in a workshop by Climate Guides, a Vancouver-based mentorship program that connects youth with experts in their desired environmental field. During this workshop, half the people were designated as 'mentors' and the other half, 'mentees', of which I was the latter. As I moved to each mentor discussing the given topics, I became suddenly aware of how valued my opinion was as a youth. I was relieved to see that the mentors, who were typically double my age, were intrigued and grateful when I shared my struggle that I could not connect my strengths with the opportunities for change being discussed (given that I did not yet have a university education or a career relating to climate change as most attendees had). Going forward, I allowed myself to open up and learn about potential careers and making connections. The cherry on top was when youth from the Fraser Basin Council were brought on stage to share their reflections on the conference during the closing ceremonies.

All in all, I believe that opportunities like Adaptation Canada 2020 help us to develop an awareness for everyone's unique strengths, all of which are necessary as we move forward in conquering environmental issues. No matter one's life circumstance, everyone has something beneficial to offer... even an everyday teen like me.

THE TREES ARE BLOOMING TOO

By Alan Vyse

**The flowers that bloom in the spring,
Tra la,
Breathe promise of merry sunshine –
As we merrily dance and we sing,
Tra la,
We welcome the hope that they bring,
Tra la,
Of a summer of roses and wine,
Of a summer of roses and wine.
And that's what we mean when we say
that a thing
Is welcome as flowers that bloom in the
spring.
Tra la la la la,
Tra la la la la,
The flowers that bloom in the spring.**

From the Gilbert and Sullivan's The Mikado

This spring has produced a multitude of amazing blossoms in Kamloops. The gardens are full of blooming flowers and shrubs: lilacs, tulips, forsythia, azaleas, hyacinths, alliums. And our fruit trees seem to be more productive than ever. My apple and pear trees were a mass of white petals, now carpeting the lawn, leaving behind the promise of summer fruit. The bees were busy! Along Valleyview Drive, the showier crabapples have also been spectacular, with hues of pink and mauve mixing with the white and purple lilacs on the road into town. Out in the grassland gullies, the Saskatoon shrubs have been prolific. From a distance, it looks as if there have been random showers of snow amid the sprouting fronds of grass. If the June rains arrive, the Saskatoon fruit will keep the local bears happy.

Although not as showy, the bigger shade trees are blooming too. The maples have been particularly fine this year: a mass of yellow flowers from stem to tip. Along the streets, redbud has been displaying its unusual magenta flowers and now pyramids of blooms are emerging from the horse-chestnut buds. Soon the yellow flowers of the honey locusts will add another burst of colour. This profusion of flowering trees is the result of the City's policy of choosing a wide variety of tree species for street planting, but not all of the trees have distinctive flowers. The street-side ash trees, and the elms and oaks of Riverside Park, have very indistinct flowers and require careful observation to uncover them.

Most of the flowering is over by the end of May but there are two exceptions in town, the sweet smelling lime trees that are found downtown, and the stately catalpa trees that show their magnificent blooms in June. I especially like the lime trees, because we have one that reminds us of a pleasant neighbor long passed. Her tree was cut by a succeeding owner but fortunately that tree gifted us a seedling that grew and grew. When it flowers, the scent is alluring and insects of all shapes and sizes come to the exuding sugars. The tree sounds alive. [continued]...



Left - Chris Jones, Choke Cherry In full bloom. Right, US Forest Service, Male Cottonwood Catkins

The conifers provide an entirely different kettle of blossoms because conifers don't flower, they cone. The male and female cones aren't difficult to spot. The males are quite colourful, usually red, and look rather like the catkins of birch and cottonwoods. Once ripe they are bursting with yellow pollen, to the dismay of hay fever sufferers. The female cones are often quite small and are a miniature version of the fully developed cone that in many species does not mature for another year.

Here is to a summer of roses and wine!

IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS

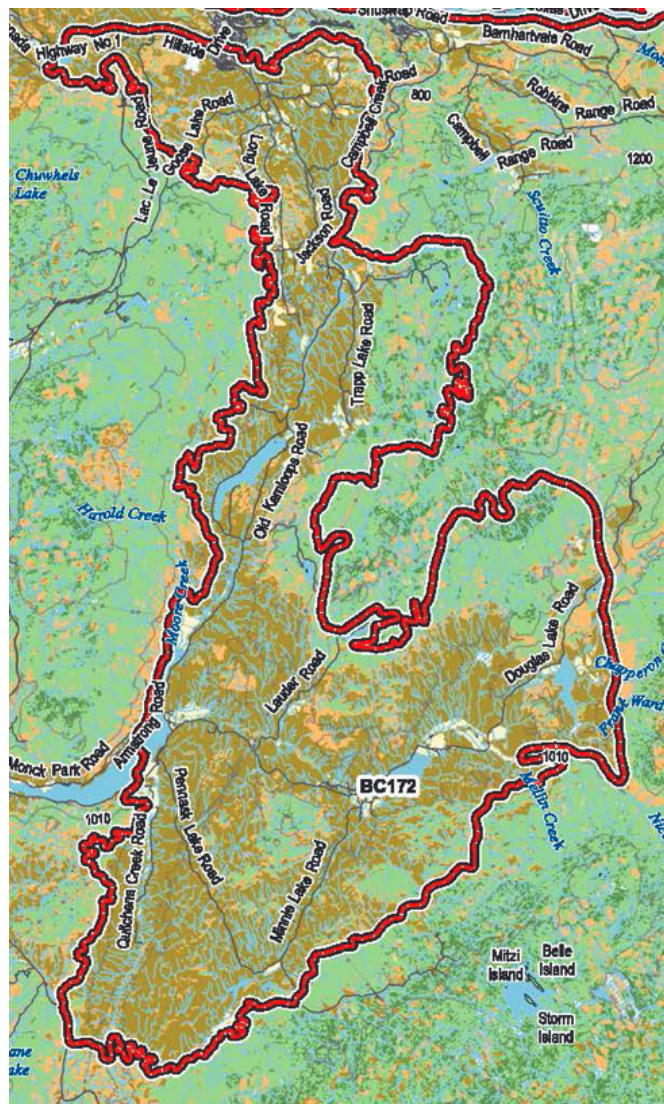
By Rick Howie

You may have heard about "important Bird Areas" or IBAs and wondered what they are. To quote from the IBA Canada website "important Bird Areas (IBAs) are discrete sites that support specific groups of birds: threatened birds, large groups of birds, and birds restricted by range or by habitat. IBAs range in size from very tiny patches of habitat to large tracts of land or water. IBAs are identified using criteria that are internationally agreed upon, standardized, quantitative, and scientifically defensible. This gives them a conservation currency that transcends international borders and promotes international collaboration for the conservation of the world's birds."

The areas have no legal status and conservation mandates reflect any protected areas where the IBA may overlap places like parks, wildlife management areas and so forth. While the boundaries do include many areas of private land, there are no IBA rules that must be followed by landowners - but of course, national and provincial wildlife regulations always apply. So the IBAs provide a way of increasing public awareness of the significance of areas where people may live and hopefully will increase stewardship of bird populations. There is no increased level

of regulatory controls over private property, which may be of some concern to people when IBAs are created.

The program began in Canada in 1996. I looked at the criteria provided by the program and decided that some areas around Kamloops met the requirements; so, in about 2000, I sent in proposals for two IBAs for our region. They were accepted as the South Thompson River (BC176, photo next page) and the Douglas Lake Plateau (BC 172, photo below).



Douglas Lake Plateau IBA

The South Thompson River IBA includes the river from its outlet from Little Shuswap Lake downstream to Kamloops Lake. The area as yet has an ill-defined minor upland component. The prime justification for its creation was the significant population of trumpeter swans wintering there, but other species of concern include Lewis's woodpecker, great basin spadefoot and western rattlesnake. Nesting [continued]...



South Thompson River IBA

populations of osprey and bald eagle are of interest and of course, the migratory salmon populations add to the biodiversity values.

The Douglas Lake Plateau IBA is a large and diverse area stretching from just south of Kamloops to Nicola lake and east to Salmon Lake. The large numbers of sandhill cranes that migrate and to a lesser extent breed in the IBA was a prime motivator for the creation. However, other species of conservation concern that occur there include flammulated owls, Lewis's woodpecker, Swainson's hawk, ferruginous hawk, burrowing owl, prairie and peregrine falcons, bobolink, American avocet, Brewer's sparrow and black tern. Large numbers of waterfowl and various raptors use the area along with a great diversity of passerines and other species.

Since the IBAs were established, I and some members of the Nicola Naturalists Club have been doing some monitoring of the areas as caretakers under the program. The Nicola group have visited the southern portion of the Douglas Lake Plateau in recent years and I have visited both IBAs on many occasions. However, there has been no publicity or specific projects developed for these areas. I would say that the knowledge of their creation is unknown among the general public.

Apart from undertaking some specific kinds of bird population surveys, I think the major challenge that we have is implementing a public awareness and education program for the IBAs. This could include on-site signing as well as articles for various media and so forth. Ensuring support from local landowners is important and allaying fears of additional regulatory environments or other infringements on private property rights will be critical. There was no recommended public awareness or approval process before establishing IBAs so we face the challenge of explaining something that has already been done and past experience suggests that not all landowners take kindly to such processes.

At the moment we have some club members who are willing to take over my role as caretaker for the South Thompson IBA and possibly for the northerly portion of the Douglas Lake Plateau IBA. I will remain in an advisory capacity and still conduct surveys, hopefully along with other club members as there is lots of potential work that can be done.

I suggest going to the website below to read up on the IBA program and to access information about all of the IBAs. The write-up for our two areas needs to be improved and a proper bird list and calendars established for each. The ones that are on the website are not accurate.

<https://www.ibacanada.com/>

BIG BIRD DAY 2020

by Heather Stalberg

Midnight! Ready, set, go!

Six hours later I was out the door. This was the Kamloops Naturalist Club's Big Birding Day, a much anticipated annual spring event starting on a Saturday at midnight and ending at 4:00 pm the following Sunday. Birders spread out over a geographic area bounded by a 50 km radius extending from the tower on Mount Dufferin. Teams are divided into South and North using the South Thompson and Thompson Rivers as a dividing line. There are three simple objectives: win, win, win- the team with the highest number of species being the winner.

This year's May 24th event saw a different approach to the day with measures implemented to mitigate the risk of COVID-19; this included using various methods to report results instead of the traditional gathering where gloating can be done in-person. All adjusted readily, ensuring it continued to be fun.

The 19 participants on Team South, broken into 13 sub-teams, birded areas from the Thompson/S. Thompson Rivers e.g.'s Mission Flats, the sewage treatment lagoons, and Pioneer Park; up through urbanized parts of the city including Albert McGowan Park; many lakes south of Kamloops e.g.'s Goose, Edith, Separation, Stump and Roche; to the mountaintops of Greenstone and Chuwells; and many routes in-between e.g.'s Rosehill, Long Lake, Duck Range, Campbell Range, and Robbins Range.

Team South's efforts garnered some notables: Least Flycatcher (sparsely scattered), Common Goldeneye (rare at this time of year), Rough-legged Hawk (rare at this time of



year), Red-eyed Vireo, Black Swift (less frequently seen in recent years), and White-fronted Goose (uncommon anytime). Northern Flicker, American Crow and Tree Swallow were the species seen by the most sub-teams.

Team North had 14 participants, and their eight sub-teams covered a lot of terrain, including: Tranquille, Cinnamon Ridge, Westsyde, Lac du Bois, Saul Lake/Red Lake backroads, Paul Lake Road and Pinantan area, Heffley Lake to Sun Peaks, McArthur Island, and Shuswap Road from Kamloops to Chase. Phew. Northern notables were Eurasian Wigeon (rare at this time of year) and Trumpeter Swan (rare at this time of year). Species seen by the most sub-teams were American Crow and European Starling.

Also, when combined, Teams South and North reported: three species of hummingbirds i.e. Black-chinned, Rufous and Calliope; six species of swallows; Flammulated, Great Horned, Barred, Great Gray, and Northern Saw-whet owls; plus a multitude of warblers.

Photos taken on the day by Glenn Dreger of a Black-chinned Hummingbird and an Eared Grebe can be seen here. More participant's photos can be enjoyed on the club's web-site. And, yes! The winner was Team South with 141 species, beating out their competitor's 137. There was a total of 161 species reported between the two teams. Well done. Looking to set-out a bit earlier next year,

Heather Stalberg.

Left, black-chinned hummingbird; right, eared grebe. Photos courtesy of Glenn Dreger.

OUR MEMBERS - JESSE RITCEY



Jesse Ritcey was born at RIH, Kamloops, on a warm day in March. The year was 1986 and it happened to be Easter weekend. His grandma, long time club member Clara Ritcey, remembers hiding eggs for his older brother Brock and that *Fritillaria pudica* had just started to bloom out at Tranquille. Jesse grew up in the Brocklehurst neighborhood, attending Parkcrest elementary and then Brocklehurst Secondary School. In kindergarten and again in high school he went to Australia to visit family and got the chance to travel around, seeing many of the fascinating plants and creatures that live there.

After graduation he worked at 'Green Appeal', a local landscaping company, and attended TRU. Despite doing well and enjoying TRU's arts program he left after only a few semesters due to health issues. Since that time he has completed a diploma in horticulture and a certificate in sustainable landscaping through Guelph distance education.

It was probably inevitable Jesse would end up joining the Kamloops Naturalist Club. Various family members have been involved as far back as he can remember. Growing up he especially enjoyed observing the Big Bird Day competition tallying and picnic that took place at his parent's house every year. However, his interest in club activities are primarily related to botany and

environmental issues. His grandpa likes to say of him, 'he knows his flowers, but he couldn't tell a rock wren from a rock wall!'

Other interests include photography, especially of wildflowers. Several of his photographs were recently published in the book "Gardening with Native Plants of the Pacific Northwest." He enjoys gardening with his family and raises various perennials that he sells every spring. This includes native plants that he grows from seeds he collects while hiking. He also likes baking, creative writing, blogging, playing with his cats, beekeeping, and reading about current events, politics, and public policy issues. He shares many of these interests with his partner Michael.

Jesse currently manages the 'Next Generation Naturalists', which is a youth environmental leadership program that he created for KNC. He's also on the board of the Kamloops Food Policy Council, where his work primarily focuses on supporting urban agriculture and the local food economy. He's also a part of the permaculture community, the Kamloops Voter Society, and the newly formed Community Alliance for a Resilient Kamloops.