

November 2020



# SAGE WHISPERS

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



Mountain Chickadee by Isaac Nelson



## INSIDE THIS EDITION

- Club Updates - 2
- November Birding and Sightings - 3
- Next Generation Naturalists - 4
- Our Changing Landscape - 5
- Tranquille Viewing Platform - 7
- Fall and Winter Hummingbirds - 8
- Mystery of the Injured Flicker - 10



## 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.

Editor: Chelsea Enslow  
chelseaenslow@gmail.com

### KNC Mailing Address

P.O.Box 625, Kamloops, BC  
V2C 5L7

### 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

Contact: Winnifred Fischer  
250.376.3944

### Find us Online!

kamloopsnaturalistclub.com

or

facebook.com/kamloopsnaturalistclub

## CLUB UPDATES

### Program Meeting, Thursday Nov. 19 by Zoom

The KNC is entering the computer age. We have scheduled a zoom meeting for Thursday, November 19, at 7:00 PM.

People will need to register in advance for the meeting by clicking on this link:

[https://us02web.zoom.us/join/zoom/register/tZYode6pqzkoEtWMKW5\\_ySCy3LDTHK1GmB4B](https://us02web.zoom.us/join/zoom/register/tZYode6pqzkoEtWMKW5_ySCy3LDTHK1GmB4B)

After registering, they will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

To attract people to the meeting, we will have a guest speaker prior to the business portion where the regular reports will be given.

Father (and creative writing professor) **George Johnson** will read his two new picture books "How Hope Became An Activist" and "Marisa and the Mountains" and discuss how and why he wrote them.

George writes stories of positive change, drawing on his social justice work over 30 years, for which he received the Y.M.C.A. Peace Medal in 2019. Among his works are Mourning and Mysticism in First World War Literature and the play Mockus, staged in Kamloops in 2017.



### KNC AGM Jan. 21 by Zoom

It will come as no surprise that we have cancelled the church hall for our AGM in January which was the always popular pot luck dinner. Instead, we will be switching to a virtual Zoom meeting on the regular 3rd Thursday meeting slot at 7 pm on January 21. Details will follow at a later date.

### Kamloops Christmas Bird Count

Dec. 21, 2020. Contact Rick Howie at 778-362-0195 or howierick@gmail.com if you wish to participate.

### Swan & Eagle Count

Jan. 17, 2012. Contact Rick Howie at 778-362-0195 or howierick@gmail.com if you wish to participate.

### 2021 Membership Renewals

Membership renewals are coming due for the 2021 calendar year. Because of the reduced club activities since everything was shut down in March, the executive passed a motion at their October meeting: For 2021, people will be offered an option to reduce fees for a family by \$10 (from \$40 to \$30), single by \$5 (from \$28 to \$23) and students by \$5 (from \$23 to \$18). **People may prefer to pay the reduced fee but are encouraged to pay the full amount.**

**If anyone has questions, please contact the membership coordinator, Winnifred Fischer.**

**win.fischer@yahoo.ca, 250-376-3944**

You can pay online [www.kamloopsnaturalist.com](http://www.kamloopsnaturalist.com) or mail a cheque the old fashioned way to the KNC mailbox: KNC Treasurer, PO Box 625, Kamloops, BC V2C 5L7.

Don't forget to sign the membership form in 3 places and each adult member of the family must sign in all 3 places.

## NOVEMBER BIRDING AND SIGHTINGS

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by Isaac Nelson

Late fall is always an interesting time for birding in Kamloops. Most migratory birds are much farther south by November, but a few species are still migrating through the region. This is one of the best times to find rare birds, like the pair of Pacific Loons that were seen near Pioneer Park in late October, or unusually late birds like the Wilson's Warbler seen at McGowan Park in early November (about four weeks behind schedule). Watch for Snow and Greater White-fronted geese hanging out with large flocks of Canada geese. The white-fronted geese can be hard to pick out, but the snow geese are hard to miss. November is a great month to see both Tundra and Trumpeter Swans side by side on the Thompson River and at local wetlands like Tranquille Marsh and the lakes along Highway 5A to Merritt. A few hundred Trumpeter Swans will remain here for the winter, while most Tundra Swans are just passing through. Other species that have arrived for the winter months include ...

## EXECUTIVE & OFFICERS

### **President**

Nancy Flood

### **Past President**

Julie Schooling

### **Secretary**

Jean Crowe

### **BC Nature Director**

Gary Hunt

### **Treasurer**

Michael O'Neill

### **Directors**

Justine Densmore-McCulloch

Margaret Graham

Chelsea Enslow

### **Program Manager**

#### **for NextGen Naturalists**

Jesse Ritcey

### **Communications**

Margaret Graham

[margaretgraham@shaw.ca](mailto:margaretgraham@shaw.ca)

250.554.1285

### **Membership**

Winnifred Fischer

### **Newsletter**

Chelsea Enslow

### **Programs**

Justine

Densmore-McCulloch

Margaret Graham

### **Bluebird Co-ordinator**

Susan Wellandt



American Tree Sparrow, Northern Shrike, Rough-legged Hawk, and Snow Bunting. All of these birds are fairly widespread, but the Knutsford area is always a good place to look. For birders who want a fun identification challenge, there are hundreds (or thousands) of gulls that can be seen from Mission Flats Road or the Rivers Trail next to the airport. Most of these gulls are Herring, Ring-billed, Glaucous-winged, and California Gulls. The less common Iceland (aka Thayer's) Gull can also be found in small numbers, but they can be difficult to pick out in large flocks.

## NEXT GENERATION NATURALISTS PROGRAM UPDATE

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By Jesse Ritcey



Next Gen Group at Lac Le Jeune Wilderness Resort

The Next Generation Naturalists program has continued this fall. As has been the case all year, Covid-19 has made delivery complicated. One thing that I've noticed is 'zoom fatigue', that is with so many events and all the university courses going online, connecting virtually is losing its appeal. So I've tried something new, which is organizing weekend long nature retreats.

The first trip was to Lac Le Jeune wilderness resort at the beginning of October. Participants travelled in separate vehicles and stayed in their own cabins. Many brought family, close friends, or roommates along with them. There was a great space at the resort where we were all able to gather, at a distance, and have a discussion. Other than that activities were self guided. People went hiking, kayaking, picnicking at Lac le Jeune Park, and enjoyed an evening bonfire. 14 youth in total made the trip.

The second trip was to Quaaout Lodge at the end of October, again in separate vehicles. The lodge has a great conference space that we used to gather. Then we went on a Secwepemc 'walk the land' tour arranged by the hotel cultural staff. This included a smudge ceremony and storytelling inside a winter pit-house. Over the course of the weekend everyone visited nearby Tsútswecw Provincial Park to hike around and watch eagles feed on salmon carcasses. Ten youth made this trip.

If accommodations remain open, the group is considering a third overnight trip in mid-December for a winter activity like snowshoeing or cross country skiing. Meanwhile, we're back on Zoom this month for the first in a series of guest speakers talking about career options where someone can have a positive environmental impact. First up is Anushka Azadi, a lawyer who specializes in environmental law.



Next Gen Group at Quaaout Lodge



# OUR CHANGING LANDSCAPE

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by David J. Low

*This article was prompted by an unidentified bird carcass found in the front yard of a house near McDonald Park.*

The blue grouse found in North Kamloops is a "juvenile" Dusky grouse. This is the species of blue grouse found in the interior of BC. If you look at the 9th and 10th primaries they are pointed whereas the adults have very rounded tips on these two outer feathers.



Dead Dusky Grouse near McDonald Park

The hoots from the male blue grouse were once common in the 1960's and 1970's when Ralph Ritcey led blue grouse surveys each spring on local areas. Presently, it is difficult to find or hear the hooters in what I refer to as the present dry forest slums. The once common dry open parkland old-growth Douglas fir and Ponderosa pine forests are almost gone, along with berry producing shrubs. These landscapes were ideal habitat for blue grouse. Today they are hard to find. Even the grasses which provided fuel to allow ground fires to spread around the areas are greatly reduced.

Fires in dry forest landscapes were once frequent enough to maintain diversity in the various plant communities across a wide array of dry soil moisture features. After looking at hundreds of pre-1900's fire scars on old trees, I found that seldom did wildfires burn over 60% of a landscape.

More often each burn was only 20% to 40% of the much larger unit. In these dry open forests perhaps a decade later a portion of the first burn unit may re-burn along with another adjacent previously

unburnt area. Grasses and often flowering forbs such as Fritillaries, lilies, and butter-cups were common on drier fired features, while many of the berry producing shrubs such as rose and snow berry plants enjoyed the moisture from drained soils and wetter sites.

Probably the unfortunate grouse in the photo came to town "shopping" for berries to fatten up for the rigors of winter, before its slow starvation diet of late summer sun scorched old growth Douglas fir tree needles. The once numerous berry plants in the once natural wild fired sites in slow growing open stands of old-growth Douglas fir and Ponderosa pine have been hard to find in the last half century. Even the old-growth trees are disappearing. Old growth trees have been eliminated, as have the berry producing shrubs, mostly by the dense stands of young forest developing in the once open understory. Without fire, the open dry forests, trend towards dense stands of young trees, which often eventually become areas of forest pest outbreaks. The young trees will out-compete the old trees for moisture in these soils. These young evergreen trees in dry systems are like sponge umbrellas, holding the snows and light rains on their needles. Frequently the snows sublimate and rain evaporates back into the atmosphere without ever reaching the ground. Under these conditions the old trees, now surrounded by their regenerating and competing offspring seedlings lack sufficient water and die directly from either drought or invasive pests such as bark beetles. The dry old trees lack sufficient sap to pitch out the beetle larvae. The fires that controlled and thinned out these dense growing young trees are no more.



Juvenile Dusky Grouse

Presently, the blue grouse species numbers in the dry interior of south central BC are down by about 90% in the last 7 decades. Along with the drop in numbers of blue grouse are declines in Lewis woodpeckers, nighthawks, poorwills, sharp-tailed grouse, clay-coloured sparrows, Lazuli bunting, alligator lizard, spadefoot toads and even the pintailed ducks. Dry ecosystem pond acidity, Total Dissolved Solids (TDS) and water levels are not operating as they once did more than a half century ago. When developing tables of wildfire effects on various wildlife species, I found all of the above species, plus many more, to be either Fire Dependent or Fire Adapted. Most of these marginal forest habitats are now ecological slums. Thus, the blue grouse and many other wildlife species have declined.

What is an ecological slum? Prior to the 1930's, open forest were common with frequent reoccurring wildfires. Fires were Mother Nature's cleansing tool. These earlier dry interior fires were not the type of destructive wildfires we've seen in the past half century. They were primarily under-burns, burns that generally stayed below the forest canopies of open old-growth forests. As Dr. Harold Biswell, PhD and Professor of Fire Ecology in California, told me in the early 1970's on strolls through my local controlled burn sites (At that time Dr. Biswell was under contract to develop the Fire Ecology section in the Faculty of Forestry at UBC), "This country has changed", Dr. Biswell said, "If it grew, it burnt!" I had carried out well over 35 controlled burns around our Region after getting burning permits from the local Forest Service District Manager. "Fires, done properly, are nature's way of maintaining biodiversity", Dr. Biswell said, "Controlled burns need to be done when Mother Nature burnt. It may take years to establish the proper conditions to burn correctly." Controlled spring burns we see in recent times, although a step in the right direction, are not achieving historic biodiversity conditions.

The seeds of many fire dependent shrubs are cracked open too early and desiccate during the heat of summer following spring burns, thus eliminating these fire dependent plants and then grasses become dominant. A much better time to burn for biodiversity is later in August after night time humidity levels have risen. Now the seeds cracked open by the fire, can absorb moisture through the fall and winter period and germinate in the spring.

In recent times, too much wildfire protection creating semi monocultures and not enough planned fuel management have cost the avian community millions of birds in the BC interior. Their food supply has declined dramatically without the diversity of plants. The insectivorous birds have been the hardest hit group; swallows, blue birds, fly catchers, Phoebes, vireos, veery, white-breasted and red breasted nuthatches, warblers, etc. In recent years, many millions are dying on their migration. Less than half a tank of gas (fat load) will not supply the energy to get many of them to their wintering sites.

With present resource management programs an old adage comes to mind, "Without change, there is no change". These fire protected dry forest systems are seldom of high economic importance to the forest industry, but historically they provided the biodiversity lacking in present resource management.

The public in general and managers in particular are very slow to accept the idea of fires as an important management tool. Probably this is THE most important tool. This needs to be addressed to change this attitude with leadership from education. But, who will do the education, given the public's large scale resistance to fire and the "Smokey the Bear" mentality.



# TRANQUILLE VIEWING PLATFORM UPDATE

By Jesse Ritcey



Left: Elliot Andrew, Kristi Iverson, Rick Howie, and Sydney Miller. Elliot and Sydney are Next Gen participants.

Right: Cocklebur (*Xanthium strumarium*). This introduced annual plant spreads through its burrs, which can either float to new locations or catch a ride on passersby.

*Forward momentum on the Tranquille Viewing Platform project is continuing. Here's an update on what's happened so far this fall and what's coming up.*

## **Fundraising:**

The #Experience Nature online auction was a fun way to engage the public and raise awareness about the project. We ended up with 76 different items posted each morning and evening for six days. In the end **\$2,282** was raised from the sale of these items.

Several people also chose to support the platform project by making cash donations. To date we've received **\$1,345**. The online Canada Helps service is an easy and secure way to make a donation, which automatically generates a tax receipt for you:

<https://www.canadahelps.org/en/charities/kamloops-naturalist-club/>

Next up, we'll be running a 60/40 raffle. Information on how to buy tickets will be available as soon as our paperwork with gaming is processed.

## **Vegetation Survey:**

Before the weather turned, a vegetation survey was conducted at the pond. Rick Howie, through his firm 'Aspen Park Consulting' arranged for botanist Kirsti Iverson to do this work. A couple of the Next Gen participants with a strong interest in native plants joined us for the morning and assisted. It was a great learning experience!

Rather than a grid survey or sampling points along transects, Kristi used the 'intuitive meander' approach. Her survey route was determined with an eye towards finding rare plants that need to be conserved. The theory is that these plants aren't evenly distributed over a landscape, so by focusing on edges of habitat and areas with different site characteristics, a botanist is able to cover a larger area and more effectively uncover noteworthy plants.

Nothing was discovered that would impede the construction of the platform but we did learn information useful for planning, such as the location of wetland areas we'll need to avoid disturbing. Sadly, much of the area is covered in Reed Canary Grass, which was deliberately introduced in the 1950's as cattle forage.

## **Park Research Permit**

As part of the planning process we need to complete a geotechnical investigation on the wetland soil. This will help us determine if we can use screw piles as the foundation for the platform. Once we've gotten approval we'll be taking a large machine out on to the wetland to drill a screw pile into the ground. It will be rigged with a gauge to measure whether the soil is providing sufficient resistance. A monitor from Tk'emlups te Secwepemc will be on hand to evaluate the site, the screw pile methodology, and to make recommendations if further archaeological work is necessary.



Tall beggar ticks (*Bidens vulgata* - no relation to the US president-elect). This annual plant produces lots of seeds with hooks on them that spread on fur and fabric alike.

This activity requires a park research permit, which has been submitted. Part of the approval process involves consultations with the dozen or so First Nations that have asserted an interest in Lac Du Bois Provincial Park. Unfortunately, the recent BC election has delayed this process, as we'll need to wait until the end of the interregnum period to consult. Once the government is sworn in we'll be able to hit the ground running.

#### Special Thanks:

Thank you to Wenda Noonan, our fund

## FALL AND WINTER HUMMINGBIRDS

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by Rick Howie

The spring and summer periods are favorite times to enjoy hummingbirds at our feeders in Kamloops. Starting about mid-April, the first of our 3 summering hummingbirds arrive back and some remain until late August and rarely until mid-September when the odd Rufous may be seen. Rufous, Calliope and Black-chinned Hummingbirds are our 3 summer birds with no records for late fall or winter.

For at least the last 30 years, Kamloops has seen all numbers of Anna's Hummingbirds that wander in all directions from their more southerly breeding grounds. They breed as far north as the lower mainland and Vancouver Island where they are year round residents. There has been a breeding record in summer in the Okanagan I believe but we have yet to confirm summer breeding here at Kamloops. I am suspicious it may be happening but birds are rare at that time of year and we have yet to find a nest.

development coordinator for doing an amazing job spearheading these fundraising efforts. A big thank you to everyone who participated in the online auction and to the businesses around town that supported us. Thanks to organizations like the Big Little Science Centre and the BC Wildlife Park, as well as club volunteers, for helping to offer nature experiences. We'd like to recognize those of you that have donated or helped with our efforts. In no particular order, a special thanks goes to:

Lyn MacDonald, Ron Albinson, Julie Schooling, Nancy Flood, Tom Dickinson, Margaret Patten, Jo Chipperfield, Elaine Sedgman, Glen Dreger, Bob Needham, Denise Caldwell, Dawn Brody, Debbie Blair, Connie Decaire, Bronwen Scott, Rick Howie, Michael O'Neill, Lynne Borle, Stan Bennett and Pat Behe, Karen Willies, June and Kats Kitamura, Jesse Ritcey, Sue Cane, Shekinah Jimenez, Margaret Graham, Gary Hunt, Marie Kabus, Mag Grant, Eleanor Hancock, Brady Mathes, Isaac Nelson, Tristan Semeniuk, Joy Gothard, Carole Hebden, Merilee Hamelock, Alex McGilvary, Teresa the Traveller, Jenna Nicklas, and Norm Dougan.

The arrival of these wandering birds in the fall surprises feeder operators who fear that they have kept the normal summer residents from migrating, but this is not the case. The Anna's will now be looking for food and if they find your feeder, they will be strongly attached to it and are unlikely to migrate back south. The challenge will be trying to help them survive during the coldest part of our winter when temperatures drop to -20°C or so in January. Hummingbirds drop their metabolic rate at night and during cold periods and go into a state of torpor for a number of hours. Then they awake and their metabolic rate rises before they move out in search of food. They are successful at surviving at the coast where the weather is milder, but their ability to make it through our longer cold periods is still uncertain. I have seen them active at -21°C but have not been able to follow any individual bird throughout the winter. Continued reports from feeder operators are valuable in this regard.





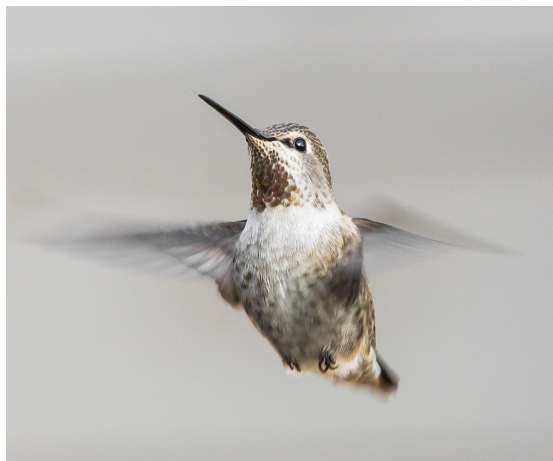
Images, from the top down

1. Male Anna's Hummingbird. Advanced immature closer to adult plumage
2. Immature male Anna's Hummingbird.
3. Immature male Anna's Hummingbird.
4. Female Anna's Hummingbird. Small area of dark or reddish feathers on throat.

So experience tells us that if you have a hummingbird at your feeder in October or later, it will be an Anna's Hummingbird. So what can you do to keep your tiny visitors going? A normal sugar water solution of 1 part sugar to 4 parts water should be fine, but with colder weather, a 1:3 ratio might help extend the life of the solution before freezing. Do not add red dye colouring to the mix. Do not add protein supplement either, despite some sources that may recommend it. The birds will search for tiny flies and other invertebrates to obtain protein and the supplement may turn bad in the solution or cause other problems for the birds. Protein supplements have been used for birds in captivity that cannot hunt for their own sources. Admittedly, insect and spider supply in Kamloops during the winter is less than at the coast, but the birds should hunt for it as they need it.



Operating 2 feeders with one kept indoors to exchange with the freezing one is a good idea. Birds do not seem to be put off by heat lamps or lights placed nearby to warm the feeders. It may be possible to wrap the feeder with warming tapes such as used to thaw pipes, so some experimenting may need to be done. Perhaps handwarmers for mittens can be adapted. I have heard of chicken coop heaters being used but I would need to see their design to determine how to use them. If you take the feeders in at night, they need to be back out at the crack of dawn as the birds will wake up early and be looking for food. The critical issue is that if you decide to try and carry a bird through the winter, dedication is needed. Missing a day without the food source may be fatal and taking your feeder down will result in the bird having to search out a new source or it may simply die. Unfortunately, when birds stop coming to your feeder, we won't know if they have survived and moved on, found another feeder or simply died due to the cold. If you happen to have 2 birds at your feeder, one may try to dominate and may well drive the other bird away or limit its feeding time.



Correctly identifying your bird is important. We frequently get immature and female birds but occasionally colourful young males. The photos below show both male and female Anna's Hummingbirds. If you feed hummers regularly, you will know that their



iridescent feathers change colours frequently in the light or as the birds adjust their spread and angles. This is particularly true in the males whose bright red throat and crown can look black in some light. I have shown a variety of images to illustrate this to help avoid confusion. Females tend to be green on

the back and light gray underneath. If you absolutely cannot match your bird to any illustrations of Anna's, contact me because the odd time, other very rare hummingbirds have arrived in BC during the winter.

## THE MYSTERY OF THE INJURED FLICKER

by Winnifred Fischer



Northern Flicker by Rick Howie

Fresh snow covered the landscape, the sun was shining and a number of sparrows in the trees were loudly chirping. As we sat gazing out the living room window, a Northern Flicker landed gracefully on the glass railing of our balcony. We watched as it searched the soffits for any remaining insects, then it flew up to a narrow space in the corner

between the wall and roof overhang where it continued its search. Suddenly, without warning, it plummeted to the balcony deck, landing on its back. It no longer looked like a flicker. Its head seemed to be twisted backwards under its body. It looked like a clump of feathers. We went to check on it but it somehow managed to fling itself off the balcony to the snow-covered lawn below. We quickly went down to investigate. The flicker, now looking like a flicker, was struggling on the ground. It unsuccessfully attempted to fly. My husband picked up a nearby fishing net and trapped the bird under it. He then gently picked it up and discovered it couldn't retract its tongue.

The back of the tongue was cut to the middle and was hanging out one side of its beak. We wondered what could have happened: had its tongue been cut on sharp metal or had it contacted frost on the metal? He gently caressed the throat and breast of the flicker and it partially retracted its tongue only to have it flop out again. This happened a number of times. At last the flicker seemed to be able to keep its tongue in place. It was then released but still struggled to fly. It would get airborne only to shudder and twist in the air then fall back to the ground. Our attempts to recapture it were unsuccessful. We last saw it in flight as it disappeared from our view.