

September 2020



SAGE WHISPERS

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



Spruce Grouse by Isaac Nelson



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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.

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

It has been a long time since the Naturalist Club held any formal activities after the pandemic closed everything down in March. The last time we met at Heritage House was in February when we held our Brainstorming Session. The first casualty was the March meeting when Rick Howie was going to speak about Important Bird Areas, however, he did write an article about IBAs for the May newsletter. The rest of the year's programs were also cancelled, including the June picnic and all of the field trips. The annual Big Bird Day was held with no car pooling and no gathering to tabulate results; however, the results were posted online and Team South was announced as the winner. Our major fund-raising activity for the year also became a casualty of the pandemic when the gold panning trips scheduled to take place in August and September with International students from TRU, were cancelled.

With no organized activities, club members made up their own little bubbles to their favorite haunts to convene with nature - Gamble Pond at McGowan Park, the flooded pond at Tranquille, Lac du Bois and further afield. The bluebird monitors inspected their boxes on a regular basis from April until the beginning of August, enjoying the birds and other wildlife to be seen away from the city.

People filed reports of sightings on the infoline and posted pictures of birds, insects, and plants. The infoline has become a useful tool for people asking for an ID of unknown species.

While no formal club activities took place, the KNC executive carried on their monthly meetings via zoom, a new experience for many. New Board Member as well as new club member, Chelsea Enslow volunteered to take over production of the newsletter after Lynne Borle announced her retirement and Chelsea's first newsletter in May earned many compliments. Discussions by the board included the massive new housing development proposed for Aberdeen; the city's plans for rip rap in Riverside Park which resulted in a letter to the City requesting consideration of mitigating erosion by planting native species, rather than removing trees and other vegetation; application for grants from various organizations to support special club projects; registering KNC with Work Safe BC to protect Next Gen and other students hired for summer jobs; and the continuing push for a Viewing Platform at Tranquille which resulted in hiring fund-raiser, Wenda Noonan to develop a marketing plan for increasing awareness of the club through social media and press releases. The first fund raising event is the on-line auction being held the week of Sept. 27 - Oct. 3.

Until the city gives us the go-ahead to meet in Heritage House for our monthly meetings, club members can stay engaged by visiting the KNC website for suggested birding areas, getting updates on the Facebook page, or being more interactive on the KNC infoline. If you aren't connected, contact Margaret marggraham@shaw.ca

FALL MIGRATION IN KAMLOOPS

by Isaac Nelson

While most birds have stopped singing and displaying by September, the unpredictability that comes with fall migration has an excitement of its own. Sparrows and warblers are passing through in large numbers everywhere, and one particularly productive location is the TRU horticulture gardens. White-throated Sparrows and many other migrant passerines can be expected there at this time of year, and a large group of Evening Grosbeaks has been hanging out in the Birch trees. The past few weeks have also seen a sharp increase in Pine Siskins and Red Crossbills around Kamloops. These species are both highly dependent on conifer seed crops and as a result can be absent one month yet abundant the next. Mid September to early October is the prime time to witness raptor and crane migration. The hills of Kenna Cartwright Park can be excellent vantage points to watch as dozens of hawks use the thermals to gain altitude before continuing south. Broad-winged Hawks, which used to be considered very rare here, are being spotted more and more frequently as they pass over Kamloops. Separation Lake is another fantastic spot to be during migration and is known for attracting a lot of uncommon birds, like the Black-bellied Plover that was seen there earlier this month.

Happy birding!

EXECUTIVE & OFFICERS

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Directors

Justine Densmore-McCulloch

Margaret Graham

Chelsea Enslow

Program Manager

for NextGen Naturalists

Jesse Ritcey

Communications

Margaret Graham

margaretgraham@shaw.ca

250.554.1285

Membership

Winnifred Fischer

Newsletter

Chelsea Enslow

Programs

Justine

Densmore-McCulloch

Margaret Graham

Bluebird Co-ordinator

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TRANQUILLE VIEWING PLATFORM

by Margaret Graham

A viewing platform overlooking Tranquille Pond has been a long-time dream of the Kamloops Naturalist Club, first envisioned more than 30 years ago by Ralph Ritcey. This area hosts more than 125 species of birds annually. It is also an important salmonid rearing habitat as well as the home for numerous wetland reptiles, amphibians, and other wildlife. The club is working with government, First Nations, and non-profit partners to help make this dream come true.

The proposal includes paths from the parking lot to both ends of a new raised wood platform with a metal roof. There will be interpretive signs to tell the story of the pond, species of interest, and the history of the land use in the area by the Secwepemc peoples. There will also be benches, garbage cans, washroom, a webcam to film pond activity, and surveillance cameras to deter vandals.

As you know, a project like this will take a lot of money. The more we can raise locally, the more matching funding we can apply for! We'll need all the help we can get to meet our goal of beginning construction in 12-15 months. We're ramping up our fundraising efforts to kick off Phase I - engineered drawings and a survey of the land project.

In the next month we're hoping to complete an investigatory installation of a helical screw pile to see if the site soil around the pond will support this type of

low impact construction. We're also planning a media blitz to get the public on board with this project.

Once the biology work and geotechnical info is in, we'll move on to working with our engineer on creating detailed blueprints and construction plans. 2021 will involve even more planning, parks permitting, environmental review, and lots and lots of grant writing.

You can help in our fund-raising efforts by participating in our online auction. Go to Kamloops 24 Hour Bid Wars on Facebook from September 27th to October 3rd and bid on our items and experiences, including goldpanning, birdwatching, and a butterfly walk; books, paintings, gift cards from area businesses, and a chess set.

You can also make a donation online through our safe and secure Canada Helps page on the KNC website: www.kamloopsnaturalistclub.com . Click on the Donate to KNC button and specify Tranquille Platform Viewing Platform in the message box.

You can also mail a cheque made out to the Kamloops Naturalist Club. Write "viewing platform"; in the memo. Mail it to Kamloops Naturalist Club, P.O. Box 625, Kamloops, BC V2C 5L7 On line Canada Help donations automatically get tax receipts. Other donations will be mailed a receipt by the KNC Treasurer.



Viewing Platform Location from Google Earth

UNUSUAL SIGHTINGS

By Tristan Semeniuk



Left: Great Egret and Great Blue Herons, Right, Great Egret

Great Egrets are normally found in the Southern United States where they breed. Every year, though, in late summer and fall, they range widely over the continent, often wandering north into Canada before heading south to their wintering grounds. They are large white herons, belonging to the same family as Great Blue Herons, Ardeidae. Although they are a somewhat regular visitor across certain parts of Canada in late summer/fall every year due to post-breeding wandering, they are considered a rare sighting and exceedingly rare in the Kamloops area. According to Rick Howie, only a handful of observations have been made over the past 40 years. The bird was first seen this summer in early August, and I first observed it on August 11th out on the Kamloops Airport River Trail in a partially flooded field, where it was foraging with a large group of Great Blue Herons. The Great Egret eats mostly small fish, but will eat frogs, invertebrates, and small mammals, having the same habits as the Great Blue Heron. Once the field started drying out on the Airport River Trail, the egret relocated to Tranquille Marsh along with the herons. The last recorded sighting of it was on September 2nd

BATS ANYONE?

by Cate Arnold

Cate Arnold spent the summer as the Thompson Community Bat Program Coordinator for the Got Bats program. Cate graduated in 2019 from South Kamloops Secondary School and is now going to Vancouver Island University in Nanaimo doing her second year of a bachelor program in graphic design. Her career goals are to combine art and nature to encourage the sustainable use of our planet's resources.

Bats are cool creatures that live in both natural and urban settings. I enjoyed helping people understand that bats are part of an ecosystem similar to all other creatures and plants. People often changed their minds about their viewpoint on bats after I explained the role bats have to play in mosquito control and backyard biodiversity. Bats are the only mammal that can fly, they are masters of echolocation, and they travel extensively to migrate.

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During the summer, I was able to give a bat presentation to a summer camp at the Big Little Science Centre. I am glad I got this one presentation because it helped with my presenting skills and how to get used to the new reality of social distancing in public.

I did a couple of bat counts around Kamloops. The bats would all come out at once after they started leaving their roost. I really enjoyed watching the bats fly out of the barn against the light blue night sky. Often times someone would either email or phone the bat program, which I would receive through my email and then proceed to answer according to what they were interested in knowing.

I collected a couple of dead bats in May for White Nose Syndrome testing. White Nose Syndrome is found in Washington and is devastating to bat populations. One of the dead bats was reported by a KNC member at McArthur Island. All bats came back negative for the disease.

If you are interested in learning about bats, I would strongly recommend you check out the website: www.bcbats.ca.



Cate delivering a presentation to a summer camp



Big brown bat by Doug Burles



Townsend's big eared bat by Jared Hobbs



Photo by Cori Lausen

Silver-haired bat by Cori Lausen

KNC SUMMER STUDENT NATURALIST REFLECTIONS

By Chase Androlick



Weed Pull at Peterson Creek, Chase is on the right

As August comes to a close while I write this, I could describe this past year as ‘interesting’ at best, and at worst, a roller coaster that never runs out of sudden drops. As Covid-19 filled media air waves in spring, the first drop for me, like many other students, was the retraction of the summer job offers I’d received just weeks earlier, and with them went the certainty of continuing school the next year. With the risks of spreading and contracting the virus, on top of market insecurity, many employers could no longer afford to hire co-op students like myself. But thankfully for me, my situation wasn’t to last. Not long into June I’d received another job offer, this time from Jesse, whom I’d known for years and frequently met through the Next Gen Naturalists which I’ve been a part of for the last year.

Work would primarily be from home, with occasional days out at Peterson Creek and the Butler Urban Farm to break up the weeks of office time (which I will admit, also happened to be the dining room table).

Working from home was not entirely a new experience, feeling much like studying or report writing it was not altogether a big change from the last month of school, but this was by far much more enjoyable. My first weeks were spent learning and writing about the KNC’s efforts surrounding the endangered spaces project that took place in the early 90’s. The time spent on this especially swelled the respect I already held for the Club. Reading about the amount of time and effort put in by past and present members to make a difference in our city was nothing if not humbling.

In the past two months I have also had the privilege to meet and work with a number of truly remarkable people, individuals I likely never would have met otherwise, and I really do believe, would be worse off not having known.

At the Butler Urban Farm I had the pleasure to get to know Kevin Pankewich and Caitlin Quist, the farm manager and research student respectively. Both brought their own unique experiences to the table, and the two never



Butler Urban Farm - Summer

ceased to impress me with what they could accomplish. Together, with Kevin's guidance and a small handful of volunteers and other workers (including me!) the space was transformed from a barren plot to a flourishing garden, boasting everything from wild asparagus, to chickpeas and corn. Likewise, from my days at Peterson Creek I had the opportunity to meet Theresa Lomax and Carman-Anne Schulz, two individuals with an astounding commitment to the park, and an ethic for work and nature conservation the likes of which I've seen matched little elsewhere. Between the three of us, and with the help of a couple other volunteers it was easy to lose count of the sheer number of bags filled to the brim with weeds that were able to be removed from the park.

While I could easily call the entire job a highlight, one other notable experience of my summer co-op comes to mind. Late in July while at the Butler Urban Farm, I spent a handful of days with pick and shovel in hand, landscaping a section of hillside. This area would go on to become the home for a host of native plants which I helped put in, including bluebunch wheatgrass, silky lupine and balsamroot among many others. What's more, very close by the newly remodelled hillside, was found a number of small, burrowed holes

into the adjacent hill, and in them what may be a species of native pollinators. If they are indeed a native bee, it would be a treat to see them buzzing amongst the flowers of scarlet gilia and mountain hollyhock in the near future, and in the heart of the North Shore no less.

As my co-op with the KNC nears its end, I can certainly say this has been a great opportunity, one I have learned a great deal from, and could not have been more grateful to the Club for. I would especially like to thank Jesse, whose efforts and activity I've seen make a difference in the community time and again, and who made my work a possibility in the first place.



Butler Urban Farm - Spring

SKELEP SCHOOL AND KNC

by Jesse Ritcey

Children at the Skelep School of Excellence will be growing and harvesting fresh vegetables this fall now that new garden boxes have been installed at the school. Shelaigh Garson, a garden designer working with Qwemtsin Health Society, led this project to improve access to nutritious food and increase food literacy skills. The garden boxes were built by TRU's women in trades program and volunteers from the Kamloops Naturalist Club. Jesse Ritcey and Michael O'Neill. Members of the Next Generation Naturalists program, Isaac Nelson, Chase Androlick, and Amber Fill, lent a hand with painting the boxes, filling them with soil, and planting them.



OUR MEMBERS - CHELSEA ENSLOW

by Margaret Graham

Chelsea Enslow is the new editor of the Kamloops Naturalist Club newsletter, Sage Whispers. Even though she had been a club member for less than a year, when it was suggested that she would be a good addition to the board, she readily agreed. Again, when it was announced that we needed a new newsletter editor, she volunteered to give it a try. What a trooper!



Chelsea was born in Vancouver and grew up in Maple Ridge. She did an undergraduate degree in Environmental Science at UBC and a Masters of Natural Resource Management at the University of Manitoba. Her choice of study was influenced by her interest in the stewardship of nature from the time she was a little girl. Her parents still tease her about how she used to “rescue” ants from drowning in the lake near town. As she got older, she sought more productive ways to understand and influence environmental stewardship, and has become more interested in the complexities and interactions of environmental and social issues.

She is currently working for the Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development, where she supports planning initiatives and coordinates the regional cumulative effects program. Her work involves a lot of project management, working collaboratively with First Nations partners, and providing information to support decisions on complex environmental issues.

In her spare time, she loves to spend time outside going for long bike rides, hikes, walks, bird watching, camping, or cross country skiing. She also loves quiet time inside baking bread and reading, or playing a board game with friends. She reads a lot of different genres of books, mostly fiction. She also enjoys hokey movies -not hockey movies, but silly B movies - especially if they involve zombies or werewolves.

Chelsea moved here in April, 2017 so she has been here 3 1/2 years. Since she has lived here, nobody has said “this is a normal year of weather”. She currently lives in the Sagebrush neighbourhood near downtown, but she is moving to the Macdonald Park neighbourhood shortly. She will miss Peterson Creek Park but is excited to explore the new area.

Chelsea found the KNC on Facebook before moving to Kamloops, and was happy to find she was moving somewhere that had passionate naturalists. She was a bit shy about joining though, and it took her over a year before she came to a meeting. She joined because the presentations at the meetings were fascinating and she was excited about meeting others who were interested in nature and finding out about the good places to go. This year has been quiet for activities due to the pandemic but she participated in the Big Bird Day, which was a bit strange to do alone but still fun.

Since Chelsea is still a bit shy in big groups of people she doesn't know very well, please feel free to reach out to her if you'd like to know more about her work or anything else!