

Winter 2023



SAGE WHISPERS

Newsletter of the Kamloops Naturalist Club
Know nature and keep it worth knowing



Sky Jarvis teaches the Kamloops NatureKids about trees and forestry (see page 5!)



INSIDE THIS EDITION

Programs & Events - 2

President's Report - 2

Kamloops NatureKidsBC Update - 5

Fraser Valley Bald Eagle Festival- 7

Book Review: The Bird Way - 8

Report White Nose Syndrome! - 9

Grasslands Conservation Council 2023 Projects - 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 quarterly.

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

PROGRAMS

Meetings:

December 21: Christmas Social at Heritage House

January 14: Annual General Meeting at Saint Paul's Cathedral. 5:30pm.

February 15: Shae Turner - Molt and Winter Ecology of Birds

April 18: Michael Blackstock - Blue Ecology and the Give Back Ethos

Events:

January 14: 50th Annual Swan and Eagle Count. Sandman Centre at 9:30 am
Organizer: Rich Doucette.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

By Nancy Flood

This year started with a sad event: the passing of long time-member Rick Howie. "Mr Bird" of Kamloops, Rick's contributions to many aspects of the KNC, as well as for naturalists in general in Kamloops—will be sorely missed. His boundless knowledge, photographic skills, and patience were a gift.

We finally emerged from the depths of COVID in 2023, so that although some people still wore masks, almost all of our general meetings this year were in person. And we had a very diverse year, as always. Following the usual fun of the AGM in January, we heard about Spadefoot Toads from Joanne Mosterd in February. We did another Zoom meeting in March so that we could compare attendance at the 2 kinds of events and to allow us to have Kieran Cox from the University of Victoria, on the topic of "Unravelling Ocean Noise". Keiran is one of the many researchers involved in documenting the how, why, and what of fish vocalizations. Check out the Fish Sounds Website at <https://fishsounds.net/index.js>. We dubbed our April meeting, "Reptile Night," as two TRU grad students made short presentations: Alexa Wiebe on the movement patterns of Painted Turtles in various water bodies, and Julien Gallo on the diets of invasive Wall Lizards. In May, Emily Lomas from Water, Land and Resource Stewardship spoke to us on invasive species—especially mammals. In September, Lyn Baldwin did a reading from, and answered questions about, her new book *Drawing Botany Home*, which has many KNC friends and connections. In October, Karyn Sutherland spoke to us on the topic of bringing nature into the daycare setting. In November, 5 TRU grad students presented on a wide variety of topics—from glacier melt to fire, and from curlews to snakes. As I write this, our December social is scheduled for the 21st—and will feature the traditional quiz from Frank Ritcey among other fun.

Our June picnic was also live, and donkey-ful! About 40 club members and associates made the drive to the Turtle Valley Donkey Sanctuary. First, we enjoyed a bird walk lead by KNC members Bob and Sandra Ewart (lots of highlights, including a Black-headed Grosbeak, which we don't usually get to see around Kamloops). We then had our picnic lunches (in whatever shade could be found) and a short club meeting. Then the highlight of the day—a tour of the sanctuary with the opportunity to meet some of the almost 100

donkeys that call it home: among them some that were standard-sized, some minis and some mammoths! It was a wonderful and informative day.

As always, most of what we do takes place outside—and COVID doesn't count. The year began with the 29th annual Eagle and 49th annual Swan counts on Jan 14, organized by Rich Doucette. We have renamed this event the Rick Howie Swan and Eagle count to recognize Rick's enormous contribution to Community Science. Our annual Big Bird Day—now also officially renamed as the Ralph Ritcey Big Bird Day—was held on May 28; Glenn Dreger and June Kitamura lead Teams South and North respectively, and Teresa Corboy tallied results—mostly reported at the picnic dinner held at Bruce and Anne Ritcey's house. Team South led this year with 141 species to Team North's 139. Another annual event was the Greenstone Mountain trip in July—lots to see. And as always, the year will end with the Christmas Bird count—this year scheduled for December 17. Let's hope it is warmer than last year!

In addition to these annual events, other field trips included participating in the Great Back Yard Bird Count via a walk around McArthur Island on a cold day in February, a lovely walk in Lac du Bois in May—birding, botanizing and journalling. The September BC Rivers Day clean up in McArthur Island Park might also fit into the field trip category: one can always spot gulls, ducks etc., when looking for trash. There will even be an “indoor field trip” again, to the Kamloops Symphony's Christmas concert— thanks to Jesse Ritcey for arranging complimentary tickets for several lucky KNC members.

As always, KNC was active in helping people know nature, and keep it worth knowing—and collaborating with other groups. In April, we ran a workshop for those interested in taking part in Birds Canada's Marsh Monitoring Program. In May, we ran a table at the Farmers Market providing info on bees with friends from the Native Bee Society of BC and later in the year we funded printing of a pamphlet on planting for native bees produced by the Thompson Shuswap Master Gardeners. In addition, KNC continued to support the BC Community Bat Program in the Thompson region. Our Bluebird Route volunteers put in hundreds of hours monitoring nest boxes over the summer, and collating data in the fall (thanks Susan Weilandt and Steve Joly). Club outreach also included members teaching courses for the Kamloops Adult Learners Society, and for the City of Kamloops Activity Program: topics included native trees and plants, advanced birding, invasive plants, and discovering Lac du Bois. We owe the teachers of these classes (Tom, Kristi, Jesse and others) many thanks, as almost every offering adds new members to the club.

We were very involved this year in making recommendations to School District 73 (SD73) district to modify construction plans for the new school going into Pineview Valley—where many of us birdwatch regularly, and where Bill Gilroy got some remarkable footage of a painted turtle laying her eggs. I have to admit that we were not very successful—at lowering a 7m retaining wall that will be built to hold up the playing field or moving it further back from the high water mark of Python Lake. But we tried; we made our presence and knowledge known to SD73 and did obtain some concessions that will help retain natural aspects of the

EXECUTIVE & OFFICERS

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Bluebird Co-ordinator

Susan Wellandt

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Doug Smith with Gary Hunt

school property. Along these lines, several club members, including Adam Soames, who is working for BC Nature on the Municipal Protected Areas Program (MPAP), communicated and met with city staffers. Uptake on the MPAP—which is designed to recognize areas within the city that have been set aside for their nature values—was surprisingly positive and is working its way through the system.

And there were even more partnerships and collaborations. We worked with Caitlin Quist, manager of the Kamloopa Greenhouse being run by the **T'kemplúps te Secwépemc** (TteS) food sovereignty team. Specifically, we propagated native plants in the greenhouse as part of our Grow Wild Project, as well as for restoration projects being undertaken in Lac du Bois in cooperation with TteS, the **Grasslands Conservation Council** (GCC) and the **Off Road Vehicle Association**. We also worked with **Kamloops Immigrant Services**, offering cooking classes to students in 8 classes in Sk'elep and Skeetchestn Community Schools and nature walks for KIS campers over the summer (hiring 4 young people over the summer to help with this). We continued our work with the **Friends of Lac du Bois** (FLdB), the GCC and the **Thompson Nicola Invasive Plant Committee**, helping with the grasslands clean up in April, doing weed pulls in summer, and doing grassland restoration (planting native plants in damaged areas of Red Hill) in the fall. We also continued our work with the **Thompson Nicola Conservation Collaborative** (TNCC), with whom we currently share Alex Bruvold, a conservation intern. Several KNC members have attended important TNCC and FLdB meetings this year to help shape the conservation plans of these groups. In addition, members represented KNC at **Together for Wildlife** engagement sessions, organized by the BC Water, Land and Resource Stewardship Ministry, as well as meetings of the **Outdoor Recreation Council of BC** (ORCBC).

We continue to partner with **Transition Kamloops** (TK) and the **BC Sustainable Energy Association** on the sustainability stories; several of the stories are available as audio tours at various sites around the city (tune in with your smart phone (or read the stories on the TK website: <https://transitionkamloops.net/2022/07/walkable-audio-tour-for-kamloops/>). Perhaps more significantly, KNC members joined with members of these and other groups to sit on from 1-4 learning modules (the number was a matter of individual choice) of a free online course offered by the Synergia Institute. Led by TK, this group obtained funds from Synergia that made it possible to advertise the course (so that more people from Kamloops than anywhere else signed up!), lead zoom or online discussion sessions after each module, and hold a big meeting of all participants in April. Called “Action Fest,” this meeting was designed to allow people to promote a Climate Action Project that they would like to undertake—and the funding even provided a small budget for each project. Twelve projects emerged—from one promoting Nature Friendly back yards, to one on a car share for Kamloops—and lots in between (for a list, see <https://transitionkamloops.net/2023/08/update-local-climate-action-projects/>). While a couple of groups have completed their work, most are ongoing. We are planning an Action Fest 2.0 event in January 2024 to check in with projects, perhaps rejuvenate them, and maybe add more!

As always, work continued on the proposed Tranquille Pond viewing platform. We lifted a portion of the 75ft x 35ft solid barrier that had been laid down in the previous year and discovered that it was at least partially successful in controlling the growth of invasive reed canary grass that chokes out native plants. We continue to raise money for the project via donations, member returns of cans and bottles, and various fundraising projects, now including collecting Nature's Fare receipts.

One of the most important events we held this year was a Strategic Planning Session. Board members and a few other interested participants spent 2 days at TRU's Wells Gray field station, reviewing our mission and vision and plans for the next few years. We will share these with members just before the AGM in February. While there, we also began planning the Wells Gray Camp that we hope to hold for other members of BC Nature this coming summer. Another project spawned during this weekend was the production of an Orientation Guide for New Board members, which is now complete.

All in all, it's been a busy year!

KAMLOOPS NATURE KIDS BC CLUB UPDATE

By Mandy Ross, Volunteer Co-ordinator



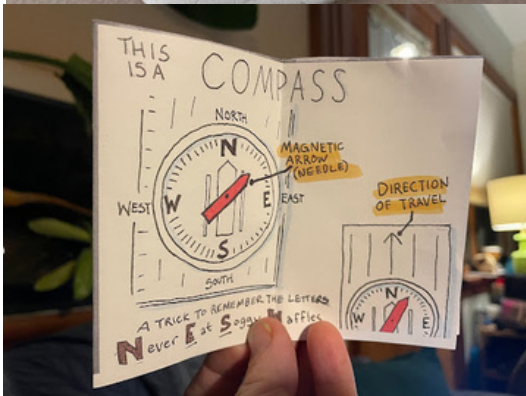
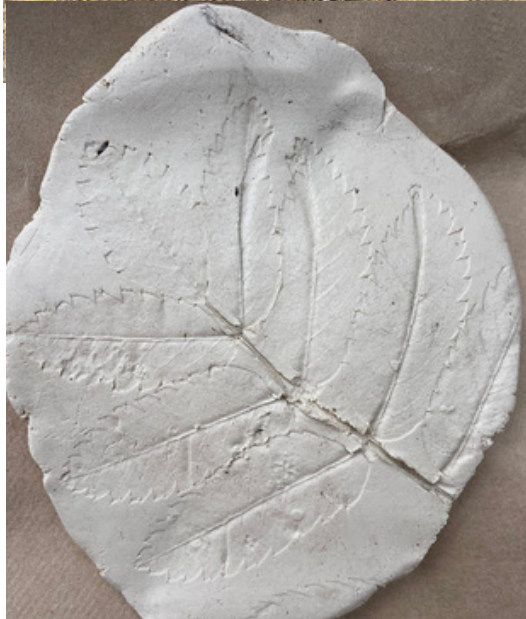
Our local NatureKidsBC club has been out for many great events this fall, after summer break, and we have more fun-filled monthly events in the works. Co-leaders Mandy and Sonya joined the KNC at the Children's Art Festival in September, to teach blind contour drawing. Blind contour drawing is done without looking at the paper, and focusing all attention on the object of interest. We borrowed some potted native plants from Jesse Ritcey for the activity and kids who visited our booth learned how to observe more closely by drawing in a new way.

In October, our community gathered in Pineview for a fun outdoor experience. Embarking on a easy hike to Python Lake, our nature mentor for the month, Sky Jarvis, North Thompson Community Forest Technician, led engaging discussions about tree species and forestry practices. Sky's expertise captivated the children as she demonstrated the use of an increment borer to measure the age of a nearby Douglas-fir. Following a lakeside snack, the kids embraced their creative side, using clay to craft impressions of local plants—an enjoyable and artistic approach to delve into the wonders of our natural surroundings. This outing was not only a chance to connect with nature but also an opportunity for community members of all ages to deepen their appreciation for the environment.

In our November club adventure at the TRU Horticultural Gardens, our enthusiastic members dove into the world of compass skills and orienteering. Andrew Corks created a compass skills booklet for the kids to learn from and it was a hit with the group.

The kids eagerly embraced the challenge as they used clues and compass bearings to navigate a route through the gardens. Each stop on the route brought them closer to the heart of the mystery, with excitement building as they collected letters strategically placed along the way to solve the puzzle. It was a day filled with laughter and learning.

In the spirit of the season, our club recently participated in the 2023 Christmas Bird Count for Kids, led by our nature mentor for the month, Rich Doucette. Despite the cool and damp weather on MacArthur Island, the enthusiasm of the kids was unwavering as they embarked on a bird-watching adventure. The afternoon unfolded with fun and discovery, as our young nature enthusiasts observed a variety of species, including a juvenile eagle, flickers, chickadees, crows, mallards, robins, hooded mergansers, and more. Rich's guidance added an



educational dimension to the experience, as participants not only marvelled at the birds but also learned about their unique behaviours and habitats. Rich brought along interesting birding resources to enhance the learning experience, including books with audio files of bird calls, a large spotting scope, and an Audubon Bird Call tool that briefly lured out small species, adding an extra layer of excitement to the day. Despite the weather, the high spirits of the participants warmed the day, making it a fun and memorable event for all involved. Our data collected will be added to the national database to contribute to citizen science.

Many thanks to our generous nature mentors! If you have anything you'd like to share with our group, we would love to hear about it at the email below. If you want to join us with your little ones, feel free to reach out to co-leaders Mandy and Sonya at kamloops@naturekidsbc.ca for more information or visit the NatureKidsBC website <https://naturekidsbc.ca/>



Membership is free or by donation. The program is geared towards kids aged 5-12, and their grown-ups and siblings of any age are welcome!

HANCOCK WILDLIFE FOUNDATION – FRASER VALLEY

BALD EAGLE FESTIVAL 2023

By Tristan Semeniuk

This November, on the weekend of the 24th, I got the opportunity to go down to Harrison Mills in the Fraser Valley and attend the annual event put on by the Hancock Wildlife Foundation, called the Fraser Valley Bald Eagle Festival. This year (2023) marks the first year of it being back following COVID and an indefinite cancellation of the event, or so the foundation thought. Due to hundreds of people coming down to the small community of Harrison Mills, COVID was not the only reason the Hancock Wildlife Foundation had made the decision to shut down the event in 2020. There were too many people coming, and they were concerned about the environmental impact on a fragile riparian ecosystem.

I came down Friday evening, staying at the Sasquatch Inn for both Friday and Saturday night. To both my mom's and my surprise, we saw two other KNC members there as well: Lyn McDonald and Ron Albinson. There were plenty of opportunities to view bald eagles feeding on salmon on the flats of Harrison River, accessible from the gazebo/eagle viewing platform that was on the property of the Sandpiper Resort. On Saturday afternoon, my friend from Abbotsford and I were able to spot a juvenile Golden Eagle soaring high up off in the distance, from the eagle viewing platform. Excited, I went to tell David Hancock, who had never seen a Golden eagle in the valley in his time he has studied and organized the Fraser Valley Bald Eagle Festival. Later on that day, David Hancock put on a free lecture about his work with Bald Eagles over the years with other members of the foundation. The work they do to study and help conserve these magnificent birds is very important, and I hope to continue attending the festival in Harrison Mills in years to come.

Juvenile Golden Eagle

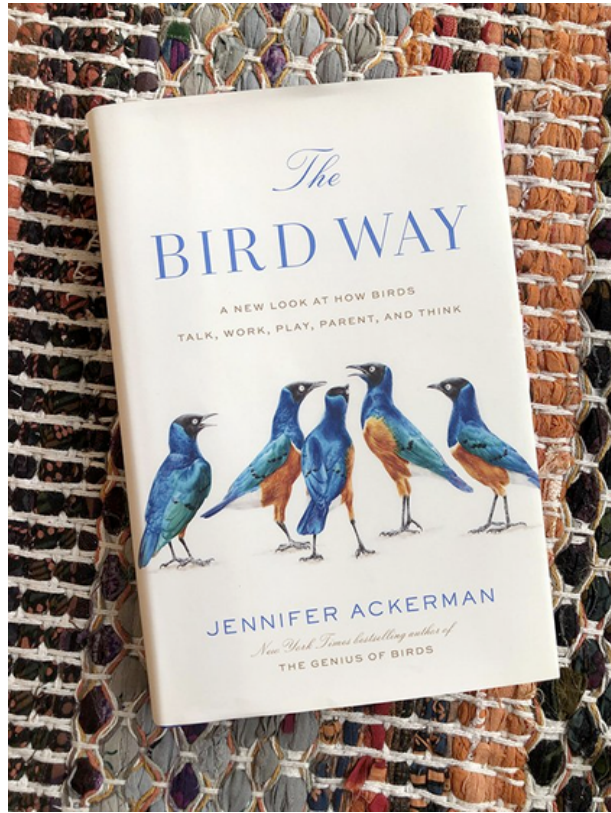


Harrison Mills, source: Open Street Map



BOOK REVIEW: THE BIRD WAY

By Tom Dickinson



The Bird Way, 2020. Jennifer Ackerman
Penguin Press, New York. 355 pp

Have you ever watched a raven, soaring high above the ground in a seemingly effortless voyage across the sky, suddenly tuck a wing, enter a half roll, and plummet in a free fall—only to perform a correction a second later to resume its original journey? It's hard not to think—'Boy, he's having fun!' Or maybe you have marvelled at the shimmering iridescence of a male hummingbird's throat at your birdfeeder, then watch him climb to a great height and enter a dive to do a snappy U-turn in front of a potential mate. I often think - 'I hope she is as impressed with his acrobatics as I am'.

Jennifer Ackerman's book, *The Bird Way*, is a collection of wonderful stories about the amazing diversity and complexity of behaviour that birds use to solve problems every day, as they carve out their specific ways of life. More than this, Ackerman uses recent discoveries made by researchers across the world to dispel false idea about "bird brains" and the limited cognitive and sensory abilities of birds. Based on biases (mainly from North American and European male ornithologists) it was thought that birds behaved and were all were pretty much the same— hence the book's title: *THE bird way*.

A couple of decades ago I would never have gotten away with even thinking that my acrobatic raven was "having fun". Today, we are allowed to credit birds with some complex levels of problem-solving, as well as spectacular intellectual feats. Ackerman is a talented storyteller who brings the behaviour of the species she is describing to life, whether she is talking about the vocalizations they are using, the colour patterns they are showing off, or the choreography of their dance moves. Technological advances and the insights of some very talented researchers have allowed scientists to better perceive the world with a real "bird's eye view" so that we can better understand their ability to make decisions. It is interesting to see how many of the new insights and research advances have come from women scientists and their teams—another feature that is very much different from a generation ago.

As has been the case with her previous publications (especially *The Genius of Birds*), Ackerman's talent for relating engaging stories of fieldwork and lab studies isn't her only skill. Her story telling is complemented by a truly impressive ability to describe the scientific framework into which each study's findings fit—or with ideas a study draws into question. Her book also provides a wonderful guide to further reading on each of that topics she covers, in a way that gives anyone who is interested a bridge to the technical literature.

I can recommend this book to everyone without hesitation!

WHITE NOSE SYNDROME

THOMPSON COMMUNITY BAT PROGRAM

By Liliana Ortega



The Thompson Community Bat Program, in collaboration with the Province of BC, is asking the public for help in the effort to detect and prevent the spread of White-Nose Syndrome (WNS). Residents are urged to report any bat activity observed in winter and any sick or dead bats found before May 31.

White-Nose Syndrome is a fungal disease that is harmless to humans, but has devastated North American bat populations. The fungus attacks bats while they are hibernating, appearing on their wings and faces and making them appear to have a white nose. Bats often wake to clean the fungus from their skin. This uses valuable energy, and finally the bats die from hypothermia and starvation. Across North America, millions of bats have been killed. Three of the 15 bat species in BC are affected by white nose syndrome: the little brown bat, the yuma myotis, and the big brown bat. Of these,

both little brown bats and yuma myotis are now listed as Endangered. As a key predator for many night-flying insects, bats are essential parts of BC's ecosystems and provide billions of dollars of economic benefit by helping control agricultural, forest, and urban pests.

First detected in New York State in 2006, the disease continues to spread, with detections on the west coast close to Seattle and in south-central Alberta, and it has recently been found in bat guano in Grand Forks BC. Increasing public reporting is the best chance to understand how WNS might spread and affect local bat populations. Though there is not yet a proven cure for WNS, several promising treatment options are being developed, and it may be possible to mitigate the effects of this wildlife health crisis.

If you find a dead bat or have sightings of winter bat activity, please report to the BC Community Bat Program online at www.bcbats.ca, via email at info@bcbats.ca or by calling 1-855-922-2287 (1-855-GOT-BATS). All live bats should be left alone — keep your distance, snap a photo and report it to the BC Community Bat Program. If you must move a bat, visit www.bcbats.ca for advice and never touch a bat with your bare hands. Please note that if you or your pet has been in direct contact with the bat, you will need further information regarding the risk of rabies.



KAMLOOPS AREA GRASSLANDS CONSERVATION COUNCIL OF BC (GCC) PROJECTS 2023

By Mike Dedels, Executive Director, and Kristi Gordon, Outreach and Stewardship Coordinator

The GCC had a busy year promoting and stewarding grasslands around Kamloops. Here is a summary of some of our outreach efforts, with many thanks to the KNC for their support!

Education & Outreach

This year, Kristi helped coordinate and deliver several events in Lac du Bois. The first was the 'Discovering Lac du Bois' tour through the City of Kamloops Activity Guide. Several Nature Journaling Workshops also took place in Lac du Bois this year. Environmental educator, Sonya Rokosh, in addition to biologist Mandy Ross, helped host these events (right). The workshops begin with an "introduction to grasslands" walk, followed by the workshop, which focuses on observing your surroundings and immersing yourself in place.



Mandy Ross (and her son, Theo) leading the nature journaling workshop in Lac du Bois Grasslands.

Kamloops Naturalist Club - Signage Project

Kristi was contracted by the KNC to help update interpretative signage located at the 9.5 km marker of Lac du Bois Road. The GCC, KNC, and Tapestry Collective Co-op are actively consulting and collaborating with the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc Museum and Heritage Park, in addition to the Language and Culture and Natural Resource Departments, to incorporate traditional ecological knowledge and language onto the signs. Please stay tuned for a sign unveiling event in Spring 2024!

Grassland Field Tours

The GCC collaborated with a number of organizations to put on field tours this year. In April, the GCC hosted a very informative tour of Lac du Bois for the BC Institute of Agrologists AGM, with excellent talks by Dennis Lloyd, Tom Dickinson and others (Figure 2). In May, Mike Dedels gave a brief grasslands introduction to BC Conservation Foundation Board members from across the province, and in June spoke to the Forest Practices Board about invasive plants near Tunkwa Lake.



Over the summer, under smoky skies, the GCC participated in events from Williams Lake to Victoria spreading the word about the importance of BC Grasslands. September saw Mike and Kristi present to the Regional Invasive Species Organizations (RISOs) at Lundbom and Tunkwa Lakes. One last tour was put on for the Canadian Forage and Grasslands Association board and staff on December 2 at Douglas Lake.



If you would like to keep up with Grasslands Council subscribe to our newsletter at Subscribe to GCC e-Newsletter ([mailchi.mp](mailto:Subscribe to GCC e-Newsletter)). The GCC looks forward to seeing you at our "Loving the Grasslands" fundraiser in February.