

Spring 2024



SAGE WHISPERS

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



Pelican over Tranquille, photo by Valerie Walsh (see pg 7!)



INSIDE THIS EDITION

- Programs & Events - 2
- Board Member Bio: Pam Willis - 3
- Book Review: Tracking Giants - 3
- Study on Bats and Awnings - 4
- Gregson Native Plant Walk -5
- Pelicans at the Buffet - 7
- KNC Special Projects Update - 8
- Lac du Bois Ramble - 9



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:

March 21: Megan Blackmore: Rooted in Nature: Cultivating Beauty and Biodiversity with Native Plants. Heritage House at 7pm.

Join Thompson Shuswap master gardener, Megan Blackmore, to explore the how-tos of integrating native plants into the home landscape. Whether you want to create habitat to support native biodiversity, reduce your water usage, or simply bring the beauty of the surrounding forests and grasslands home, there are native plants for every garden. By choosing the plants that are naturally adapted to our region, gardeners can create attractive, low maintenance green spaces that benefit birds, bees, butterflies and beyond!

Megan is a certified horticulturalist who works for the Invasive Species Council of BC as a learning coordinator. She is a Master Gardener with the Thompson-Shuswap chapter and volunteers for the Kamloops Naturalist Club, the TRU Friends of the Gardens, and Living Lakes Canada. Megan is an avid naturalist with a passion for spreading awareness and education about protecting BC's incredible biodiversity.

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

Michael Blackstock, an independent Indigenous scholar and retired professional forester, will present his theory called "Blue Ecology" which emerged from his research on a deceptively simple question: what is water? He will follow the thread of enquiry starting with redefining water and a forest ecosystem to the ripple effects on biocultural diversity and understanding climate change using a water lens. Finally, he will offer substantive actions for individuals and organizations to ensure future generations can survive with dignity.

Michael is a Founder, and Director of the Blue Ecology Institute Foundation and of Gitxsan/European heritage; he is a carver, visual artist, poet, forester, and mediator and has a Masters of Art degree in First Nations Studies and he has served as a member of the UNESCO-IHP Expert Advisory Group on Water and Cultural Diversity.

May 16: Lilana Ortega: Bats Note: ***Special Location*** Hal Rogers **NOT Heritage House**

Events

Sunday April 7: Lac du Bois Spring clean up

We would like to put out a call for volunteers to help plan the annual grassland clean-up. What we need help with:

- picking a location (we generally alternate between Dewdrop and Lac du Bois Rd)
- creating a map for attendees
- organising food and drinks for the day
- rounding up paper/plastic bag donations
- rousting volunteers to join on the event day
- leaders for each clean-up location

Please email Mandy Ross at mandyjross@gmail.com directly to sign up. Thanks to Jesse and Nancy for getting this going again this year.

BOARD MEMBER BIO: PAM WILLIS

Pam Willis joined the Kamloops Naturalist Club in May of last year after taking the very enjoyable Advanced Birdwatching class led by Tom Dickinson.

Pam was born in PEI and raised in Alberta; she then headed west to Victoria to pursue her interests in marine biology. After finishing her BSc and spending a few years as a research assistant, she got an MSc at Simon Fraser University, where she studied mating systems and hybridization in porpoises. She later did her PhD at the University of Texas, where she



continued to explore mate choice and hybridization in freshwater fishes and in wood warblers. She worked as a freelance science editor for many years before moving to Kamloops in 2021.

Pam currently works as an editor of distance-learning courses at TRU. Although she very much enjoys working as an editor, she considers herself a “lifelong biologist” and is inspired and energized by all the great activities of the club. She looks forward to contributing to the club’s efforts in her new role as director at large.

BOOK REVIEW: TRACKING GIANTS

By Tom Dickinson

Tracking Giants: Big Trees, Tiny Triumphs and Misadventures in the Forest. 2023. Amanda Lewis. Greystone Press, Vancouver. 242pp

I’m sure many of you, like me, have stood beside an immense tree in a forest and wondered, “How old is this beauty?” or “How has it seen the world change over its life?” Giant trees attract the attention of many people, for many reasons—ecological and spiritual!

This book is about Amanda Lewis’ own quest for the “Champion” trees: the largest known trees of their species in British Columbia. And she is not alone. There is a Big Tree Registry in BC--scientists, environmentalists, and others make a sport out of finding and recording the size of these giants! But

EXECUTIVE & OFFICERS

President

Nancy Flood

Vice President

Diane McKelvy

Past President

Julie Schooling

Secretary

Jean Crowe

BC Nature Director

Gary Hunt

Treasurer

Chelsea Enslow

Directors

Justine Densmore-McCulloch

Pam Willis

Program Manager for Special Projects

Jesse Ritcey

Membership

Winnifred Fischer

Newsletter

Chelsea Enslow

Field Trips

Tom Dickinson

Bob Needham

Communications

Maraget Graham

Winnifred Fischer

Bluebird Co-ordinator

Susan Wellandt

Webmaster

Doug Smith with Gary Hunt

as she says, finding the champion is like “squeezing Jell-O”. Just when you think you have the champion, someone else finds a bigger one or yours dies (or is harvested).

Lewis’ personal story is embedded in her chapters, each of which focusses on a journey to find the big trees in the Registry. As a burned-out book editor, she moves back to BC from Toronto to discover the natural world she played in as a kid, to take up hiking, and to reconnect with family. As a “type A” personality, she sets herself the goal of finding the champions of all of BC’s tree species within a year, despite not knowing the difference between a birch and a beech. It was a game to help with some emotional healing.

Lewis’ writing is engaging, sweet, funny, and informative. She doesn’t dwell on the taxonomic details of identification, or the specifics of how to measure the size of big trees, or how not to get lost using GPS. Instead, she tells engaging stories about the quest for each champion. Her accounts describe the personalities of other “trackers” and keepers of the Registry, foresters who care for forests rather than just fibre, and Indigenous knowledge keepers. It was easy (and enjoyable) to read her book from cover to cover in just a couple of sittings.

Her quest takes her from well-known places where famous battles for old growth have taken place on Vancouver Island, to the suburbs and backyards of Vancouver, to stretches of Northern rivers, and to BC’s Southern Interior. Her descriptions of some of the landscapes are wonderful and let you feel like you are with her on her hikes.

Along the way, Lewis herself changes. Her self-centred goal to catalog champions takes a back seat to things her eyes tell her about the ecology of the forest. And with great respect, she becomes more tuned in to values of the forest that have been treasured by Indigenous people for millennia. She sees the forest as more than just the biggest trees and makes a strong case for conserving the forested ecosystems we have left.

I picked up this book on a whim while I was shopping for camping supplies and I’m glad I did. This is Amanda Lewis’ first book and I look forward to reading more of her exploits.

BC BAT STUDY REQUESTS HOMEOWNERS TO REPORT BATS USING EXTERIOR WINDOW SHADES & POWER AWNINGS

Did you know that bats are getting injured or even squished by roll up blinds and power awnings that provide shade to homes in the summer? The BC Community Bat Program is actively seeking assistance to assess how common this is and address it accordingly.

Bats are important wildlife that provide natural insect pest control. “Most people install exterior roll up blinds and power awnings on the south or west side of their house to help create shade and cool their house. The last thing they want to do is harm bats as a result of their action,” says Liliana Ortega, BC Community Bat Program Thompson Region coordinator. “However, over the last few years, we’ve been getting reports in southern BC of bats being attracted to the shutter housing or box into which the blinds or awnings roll. Bats are accidentally and unintentionally getting squished or injured when the blinds are rolled up and then they fall out dead when the blinds get rolled down”.



Right: Photo by Troy Corbin. If you have seen bats getting unintentionally injured or squished by exterior awnings and roll up blinds, please participate in the study to help biologists understand if this is a common occurrence.



BC Bat Study requests reports of bats using exterior window shades and power awnings like this one.



New study is asking for assistance from the public: please report sightings of bats using your exterior roll up blinds, shades, or awnings.

For more information, please contact:

Liliana Ortega, Thompson Regional coordinator, BC Community Bat Program.
thompsonbcbats@gmail.com, C. 250-809-8152

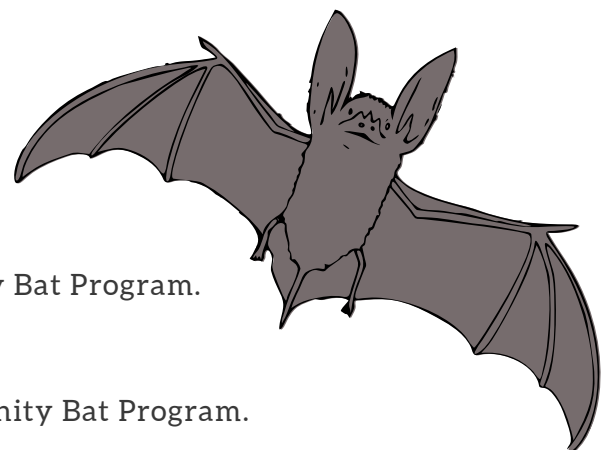
Paula Rodriguez de la Vega, Provincial coordinator, BC Community Bat Program.
info@bcbats.ca, C. 250-809-8152.

Bats differ from mice in their behavior; they do not construct nests, nor do they chew or scratch to access buildings, as rodents often do. Some bats are, however, drawn to small, secure spaces in human-made structures, making awning or shade boxes appealing to them. To address this, a potential solution involves modifying the awning box design by incorporating features like broom bristles or a cap to seal the entry gap, effectively preventing bats from entering.

Nine of the 15 species that live in British Columbia are listed as at risk of disappearing. “We only have insect eating bats in BC. They control nocturnal insect populations and help cycle nutrients from wetlands to forests,” says Liliana.

Bats are in trouble as they face many threats including white-nose syndrome (WNS), a disease that has killed millions of bats since 2016. WNS does not affect people or pets.

If you have seen bats roosting in your summer roll up blinds, shades, or awnings in the past years, please contact the BC Community Bat Program at <https://bcbats.ca/got-bats/dontsquishbats/> email info@bcbats.ca or call 1-855-922-2287. To report dead bats this winter, please visit www.bcbats.ca. The BC Community Bat Program is funded by Environment and Climate Change Canada, Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation, Habitat Stewardship Program, and administered by the BC Conservation Foundation.



THE GREGSON NATIVE PLANT WALK

By Gary Hunt



Some of you may have seen the new signage on McArthur Island designating The Gregson Native Plant Walk. Our younger club members will not have known Jack Gregson, but he was a prominent member of KNC and the naturalist community for many years. I remember the presentations he made to our club on local butterflies. He would capture them and put them in the refrigerator to slow them down, then photograph and release them.

His obituary notes his many accomplishments. Jack was a true naturalist and environmentalist. In 1936 he established the Kamloops Outdoor Club. During his 70 years in Kamloops, he was an outspoken environmental advocate. He was also a founding member of the Kamloops and District Garden Club (1950) and the Kamloops Naturalist Club (1970). He received many awards for his efforts and is recognized for his leadership in bringing about numerous initiatives. Among them was the Waterway Park at McArthur Island, the Butterfly Gardens at Riverside Park and McArthur Island, and the bicycle/footpath east of his property on the South Thompson River. He received the Grassroots Award for beautification and protection of the Kamloops natural landscape, a BC Federation of Naturalists Club service award, the Kobayashi Award for best landscaped property, and was made a Freeman of the City of Kamloops in 1990.

In 2000, Jack was awarded an honourary doctorate from Thompson Rivers University. This award recognizes his distinguished career in entomology and numerous other accomplishments. The award notes that Jack's research

achievements are known and respected worldwide; he published over 80 scientific papers and was the US Naval Medical Unit's consultant on parasite issues in the Middle East. As an international expert, he was invited to attend World Health Organization and other international congresses related to arthropod-borne diseases in the US, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Switzerland. He was recognized as Canada's leading authority on ticks and tick-borne diseases, and named three new species of BC ticks. He had an eastern tick, *Ixodes (Pholeoixodes) Gregsoni*, named after him in recognition of his 40 years of scientific contributions to the understanding of the taxonomy, ecology, and disease vector capacity of ticks. Interested in the field of entomology beyond his specialization, he also photographed over 40 local species of butterflies and moths.

The original trail named in his honour was east of the family property that connected Lorne Street East and Kelly Douglas Road and ran next to the South Thompson River. It was closed in 2020 when the CP rail line was expanded. In 2021 we sent a request to City staff that a new trail be named. After consultation with the five Gregson siblings, it was agreed that the native plant walk on McArthur Island would be appropriate.

Thank you to Sue Cane, friend of the Gregson family, for the photo and bringing this to our attention.

PELICANS AT THE BUFFET: A RIVER SPECTACLE

By Nancy Elliot, photos by Valerie Walsh



Many people enjoyed the several hundred (200-300) American White Pelicans (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*) that graced the river, particularly around Cooney Bay, this fall. Although Pelicans can be viewed every year, for a time this year the low water levels in the Thompson River blocked migrating salmon from their spawning route up the Tranquille River-making it especially attractive to fish eating wildlife. All the salmon swimming around the mouth of the creek must have seemed like a buffet to the hungry pelicans!

Pelicans have a striking appearance, including distinctive white plumage, contrasting black wingtips, and a long, prominent, bright orange bill. Juveniles are duskier on the head, neck and back but are also mainly white. The American White Pelican is one of the largest bird species in North America, with a wingspan of 8 to 9.5 feet, a length of 4 to 5.4 feet, and a weight of between 22 and 24 lbs. Pelicans are known for their graceful flight and their ability to glide on thermals for long distances, and combined with their size, offer bird enthusiasts and nature lovers alike a truly awe-inspiring sight.



In Canada, most pelicans breed in the prairie provinces; in British Columbia, there is a breeding population using the islands in Stum and Puntzi lakes on the Fraser plateau (west of Alexis Creek). Pelicans are colonial nesters, and the estimated breeding population of BC is between 250 and 1,000 birds. Pelicans may also be seen foraging on nearby lakes, flying 50-165 km from their nesting islands to feed. The B.C. Conservation Data Centre lists this provincial breeding population as 'Red listed' and Critically Imperiled (S1B). Pelicans migrate to southern California, the Gulf States, Mexico, and Central America for the winter months.

Pelicans are primarily fish-eating and often feed together in groups. They are known for their cooperative feeding behavior, especially when hunting for fish. One common technique they use is called "cooperative fishing" or "group fishing." In this method, a group of pelicans will work together to herd fish into shallower water or encircle them, making it easier for the pelicans to catch their prey.

The pelicans were here to feed during their migration south. Staff from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) explained that the river had become submerged due to drought conditions, with the water flowing beneath sand and rock deposits. After a clear channel was excavated, salmon were granted passage to their spawning grounds, and they were able to navigate upstream, away from the hungry pelicans.



SPECIAL PROJECTS UPDATES

Update 1: Signage for Lac du Bois Off-Road Vehicle Area

By Alex Bruvold, photos by Tay Powrie

Grasslands, the rarest of BC's ecosystems, are home to about 30% of BC's species at risk (SAR). These ecosystems, including the Lac du Bois Grassland Protected Area, are susceptible to disturbance due to factors such as low precipitation levels and a high proportion of bare ground; external pressures such as climate change, urban development, forest encroachment, grazing, invasive species, and recreation have large impacts on grasslands and have all been recognized as issues concern for Lac du Bois.

The Off-Road Vehicle (ORV) area, directly south of the Lac du Bois protected area, but still within the lower to middle grasslands, is designated for use by ATVs and 4-wheel drive vehicles. Although, as noted, it is outside of the protected portion of Lac du Bois, the ORV area still contains sensitive habitats that are critical for SAR such as the Great Basin Spadefoot, Western Rattlesnake and a multitude of other native terrestrial and aquatic species. To mitigate the negative impact of ORV activities in area, KNC secured funding from Environment and Climate Change Canada, the Nature Trust of British Columbia and Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation.

Project Update

Funding for the ORV project is being used to establish fencing and educational signage in the ORV area as well as to develop a restoration plan to enhance critical habitat within the area of a degraded pond. So far, KNC has undertaken a variety of activities including:

- Water quality analysis;
- Groundwater modeling;
- Surveys of vegetation and fauna;
- Collection of native seed;
- Landscape management plan design; and
- Acquisition of knowledge for signage content.

KNC is currently working on finalizing the design of signs for the ORV area and establishing fencing in the area, as seen in the map below. The signs, which are meant to educate recreational users about the SAR and the sensitive nature of the ecosystem, will cover four topics: Aspen Copse Habitat, Duck Pond, Great Basin Spadefoot Habitat and Saline Pond Habitat. As a physical barrier to prevent further damage to the habitats, fencing will be installed within the area. By the end of 2024, KNC is hoping to have both educational signage and the fencing project completed.



Update 2: Heritage Canada Funds new KNC Project: *Thrive*

By Alex Bruvold

Through conversations with our members of our community and our partners, KNC has learned about the many barriers faced by youth from Indigenous, newcomer and immigrant communities with respect to experiential learning opportunities and accessing various community services. From unique barriers to systemic barriers, these youth are disproportionately missing out on learning opportunities that could increase their knowledge, build community and strengthen their sense of self identity. This has not only created disparities in enriching experiences for youth, but also resulted in missed opportunities for cross-cultural learning that would strengthen the fabric of Canadian society and our awareness of each other's unique identities.

To address these barriers, KNC created the *Thrive* program to encourage and engage with youth in diverse communities via rich learning experiences related to nature and food. After a successful history of running a youth environmental leadership program (the Next Generation Naturalists), hosting weekly field trips for newcomer and immigrant youth at Kamloops Immigrant Services (KIS), and completing the 'Everyone Eats' partnership project, KNC felt well-equipped to build upon the learning obtained, and move forward to addressing some of the challenges faced by youth in our community.

Thrive consists of a series of experiential learning events and opportunities based around unifying themes like food and time spent in nature, which will engage youth, particularly Indigenous youth and newcomer and immigrant youth. Participating in nature and cultural field trips, conferences and workshops, cultural dinners and more, will bring youth from these diverse communities together to obtain knowledge while also building cross-cultural connections. The ultimate goal of *Thrive* is to provide community groups valuable insights into how to address barriers and gaps where experiential learning opportunities do not yet exist and provide a space for people from different backgrounds to interact and learn from each other, celebrating and increasing awareness of Canada's cultural diversity.

LAC DU BOIS RAMBLE WITH FRANK RITCEY

By Julie Schooling



On Saturday, March 16, Frank Ritcey educated and entertained 36 happy hikers on a 5-hour ramble along the north side of Lac du Bois. We were thrilled to have so many new faces in the mix and hope that some of these first-time field trippers will join KNC! The goal of the walk was to spot and identify wildlife tracks but given the recent melting of remaining snow patches, there were very few distinct tracks except for the traces of voles tunneling under the snow...this did not deter Frank, who found dozens of other fascinating facts and stories to share with the group.

We started out at the "Lac du Bois Wetland Conservation Project" sign and paused at the banks that slope down to the lake to hear about Western Painted Turtle nesting...



Frank pointed out evidence of nests covered over by mother turtles as well as paper-thin shell fragments that could be from past hatches or nest predation. He also reminded folks that turtles found crossing roads should be assisted in the direction they're going (likely to nest), NOT returned to a water source! Throughout the field trip, Frank sprinkled in stories of wildlife sightings he's made along this trail, and where and when to look for certain species.

He also talked about population dynamics - for example, when ground squirrel populations increase, so do badger numbers; higher numbers of wolves mean lower numbers of coyotes BUT higher numbers of foxes. He pointed out lichen on trees near the trail and noted this as a key winter food for deer...this ties into the importance of downed trees or trees left in harvested areas. We paused to observe multiple cavities of different types and sizes in older wildlife trees which serve Pileated Woodpeckers, Flammulated Owls, and countless other species.

When we reached the meadow to the west of Lac du Bois, Frank emphasized the many opportunities to sight wildlife. He has seen many bears and wolves in and around the meadow (including a very intense bear-wolf battle), and noted that it's a great place to see Sandhill Cranes when they are migrating through Kamloops, typically in April.



The group paused for a picnic lunch overlooking the meadow then went a little further to pay respects to a couple of massive old-growth trees, one of which Frank estimates to be 500 years old! A huge thank-you to Frank for an engaging day out!

A huge thank-you to Frank for an engaging day out!