

Summer 2024



SAGE WHISPERS

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



Tree Swallow spotted during the Ralph Ritcey Big Bird Day
photo by Teresa Corboy (see pg 4!)



INSIDE THIS EDITION

- Programs & Events - 2
- Board Member Bio: Pam Willis - 3
- KNC June Picnic - 3
- Ralph Ritcey Big Bird Day - 4
- BC Nature AGM - 5
- BC Nature Club Member Award Nominations - 6
- Merlin Bird ID App - 7
- Morel Mushroom Season - 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

No meetings until September!

Events

Sunday, July 7 Greenstone Mountain - Alpine Flowers and Birds. Meet in the parking lot at Aberdeen Mall on the Cineplex theatre side closest to the highway at 9:00 AM for the annual KNC tradition of visiting Greenstone Mountain to see birds and alpine flowers. Expert as well as beginner birders welcome.

<https://kamloopsnaturalistclub.com/event/greenstone-mountain-field-trip/>

NOTICE: BC NATURE SCHOLARSHIPS

Bert Brink Scholarship

This scholarship for \$2500 is awarded to graduate students. Applicants should be registered in full-time studies towards a post-graduate degree at an accredited institution of higher learning, in a program which will lead to a Masters or Doctoral Degree in a discipline which contributes to an awareness, appreciation, improved management of flora and fauna, conservation, restoration, and understanding of our natural environment.

The scholarship honours the memory of Dr. Bert Brink, a past president of BC Nature and strong advocate of nature stewardship and conservation. Brink was active in many organizations related to agronomy and plant science. They include the Agricultural Institute of Canada (AIC), the Canadian Seed Growers' Association, the British Columbia Institute of Agrologists (BCIA), the Canadian Society of Agronomy, the American Society of Agronomy, the Genetics Society of Canada, the American Society of Range Management and numerous others.

Deadline: July 15, 2024, application link:

<https://bcnature.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/2024-Bert-Brink-Scholarship-application.pdf>

Rene Savenye Scholarship

This scholarship for \$2000 is awarded to a post-secondary student enrolled in an undergraduate degree program that contributes to awareness, appreciation, and understanding of our natural environment.

The scholarship honours Rene Savenye, naturalist and mentor. Rene was an enthusiastic contributor to numerous clubs: the North Shore Hikers, Vancouver Natural History Society, Valley Outdoor Club, White Rock and Surrey Naturalists, Surrey Green Timbers Forest advisory committee and the Geological Survey of Canada. Rene mentored several organizations at their start-up and was always quick to volunteer to lead a nature walk in the community. He was the consummate teacher, exhibiting uncommon patience and enthusiasm while explaining the marvels of nature.

Deadline: July 15, 2024, application link:

<https://bcnature.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/2024-Rene-Savenye-Scholarship-Application.pdf>

KNC MEMBERS FLOAT INTO SUMMER

By Julie Schooling *Julie*

On the evening of June 20, the longest day of the year and the most beautiful yet, over 25 KNC members met at scenic Paul Lake Provincial Park and soaked up the sunshine ahead of a short business meeting back on shore. While there were more people out enjoying the water than there were waterfowl, a pleasant time was had by all. Many thanks to Jean's neighbours who kindly hosted our members on two luxurious boats while Jean and Ron floated the rest on their patriotically painted barge! Happy summer, everyone, and see you in the fall or out at field trips in the meantime...keep an eye on the KNC InfoLine for sightings and events!



EXECUTIVE & OFFICERS

President

Nancy Flood

Vice President

Diane McKelvey

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

Nancy Flood

Julie Schooling

Field Trips

Tom Dickinson

Bob Needham

Communications

Margaret Graham

Winnifred Fischer

Bluebird Co-ordinator

Susan Weilandt

Webmaster

Doug Smith with Gary Hunt

RALPH RITCEY BIG BIRD DAY 2024

Photos and Article By Teresa Corboy *Teresa*

On Sunday May 26th thirty birders participated in the Ralph Ritcey Big Bird Day friendly birding competition. Teams are divided between the North and South side of the river. Areas covered ranged from in-city areas like the Valleyview Nature Park, Pineview, and MacArthur Park to more remote areas such as Greenstone Mountain, Sparks Lake and Duck Range.

Teams started as early as 12 am and birded through to 4pm with everyone gathering at the Ritceys for a picnic dinner, to enjoy their beautiful garden and to tally the results.

This year Team South was victorious with 138 species to North's 125. In total, 149 species were spotted with 11 species seen only on the North side and 24 only seen on the South. Some highlights included a Pacific Golden Plover, a Black Chinned Hummingbird and a variety of owls, among them the Flammulated and Long-eared Owl for Team South. For team North exciting sightings were Sharp-tailed Grouse, Sandhill Crane, Golden Eagle and Long-billed Curlew.

Both teams look forward to meeting again next year for this longstanding club event!



Hairy Woodpecker



Mountain Bluebird



Olive-sided Flycatcher



Western Tanager



Rufous Hummingbird

Wilson's Snipe



BC NATURE AGM

By Gary Hunt + Jesse Ritcey

Gary

The 2024 BC Nature Conference and Annual General Meeting was held May 9 - 12, and was hosted by the Arrowsmith Naturalists. The conference occurred on the unceded traditional territories of the Snaw-Naw-As People and the Qualicum First Nation. The theme was "Taking Action for Nature" and activities centred around the Qualicum Beach Civic Centre.

The program featured seven guest speakers with topics including the UNESCO Mount Arrowsmith Biosphere Region, Important Bird Areas and Key Biodiversity Areas, the ecosystems of the Harewood Plains, and the history of the North Island Wildlife Recovery Centre (<https://www.niwra.org/>). A highlight for me was a panel discussion of local elected officials on the topic of "How to Best Engage with Government Representatives to Protect Local Nature." The key takeaway was to seek opportunities to talk with local representatives and focus conversations on positive things that they may be able to help with. An angry attitude with demands for what you want will not get support.

The keynote speaker following the banquet was Dr. Loys Maingon* who gave a talk titled "Biodiversity Rhythms: Preserving Old-Growth Algae and Fungi for Future Generations and Cultures." I was disappointed in the presentation in that he tried to present a lot of content on poor quality slides with wide-ranging topics poorly organized into sections, and taking much too long for an after-banquet presentation. I think a lesson for AGM organizers is to be sure that someone in the club has heard the speaker before an invitation is made to avoid disappointing surprises.

On balance, the conference was excellent: the organizing committee did an outstanding job and the Qualicum Beach Civic Centre is a first-rate facility. KNC attendance was great; at least 10 members attended, including Mandy Ross, who received the Daphne Solecki award at the banquet.

*<https://www.cumberlandwetlands.org/loysmaingon>

Jesse

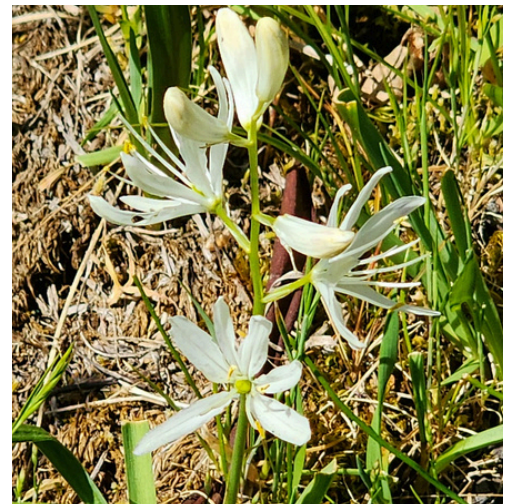
One of the highlights of attending a BC Nature AGM is getting to pick from the menu of field trip options. Each trip highlights something worth seeing in the region holding the AGM and is led by a local naturalist. This year there were 23 selections and with only time for 3, I had to be strategic about exploring as wide a range of island ecosystems as possible to achieve my goal of seeing as many different plant species that don't grow in Kamloops as I could.

My favourite field trip was a visit to Enos Lake, in the Nanoose Bay area, to see a Garry Oak meadow in bloom. Here are some of the showiest wildflowers I found:

Yellow monkey flower (*Erythranthe guttata*)



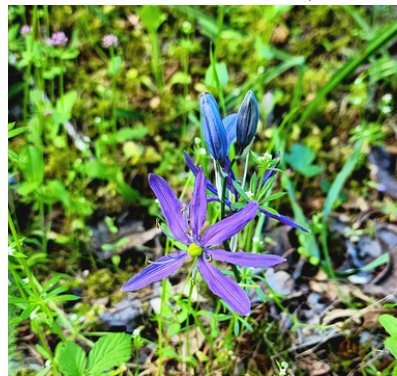
Common camas, rare white specimen (*Camassia quamash*)



Seablush (*Plectritis congesta*)



Common camas (*Camassia quamash*)



Mandy Ross

Daphne Solecki Award Nomination

This Award recognizes persons who have contributed to nature education for children in British Columbia.

The Kamloops Naturalist Club (KNC) considers itself very lucky to have Mandy Ross among its ranks, as it is people like her who are inspiring the next generation of naturalists. Mandy got her start in nature education as a WildSafeBC coordinator, where she presented to communities and students across the Thompson-Nicola Regional District about wildlife identification, behaviour and how to live near wildlife. In 2016 she took over the Kamloops Nature Kids group and hasn't looked back! Active year-round, the kids hike, watch birds (including doing a kid-friendly version of the Christmas Bird



Count), look at everything from plants to bugs and spiders to turtles and snakes, help with clean-ups, and learn skills they will carry with them forever: how to use a compass, a pair of binoculars, a field guide and other tools of the trade. Most importantly, they learn to be careful observers! One of Mandy's most useful projects in this regard is nature journalling; with pencils, watercolour paints, identifications and ideas, the kids fill their journals while focusing on describing or drawing. Perhaps even more importantly, Mandy shares all of this with the older crowd, in regular write-ups about NatureKids activities for KNC's newsletter. Needless to say, membership in the group has grown since 2016, as parents consider themselves lucky to learn from Mandy and the local naturalists she has organized into joining outings!

Of course, it doesn't stop there. Mandy accompanies her young son's class field trips whenever possible and has presented a video to the class on what it is like to be a biologist. She is a volunteer reviewer for the Grasslands Conservation Council's project of developing curriculum for elementary students and has offered "all ages" journalling workshops for that organization as well. "Pond-dipping" is another fun activity she has in her repertoire; she has led outings for various KNC joint events, including one with Kamloops Immigrant Services and one celebrating the 50th anniversary of SD73's McQueen Lake Environmental Centre. Mandy's actions and activities clearly promote the motto of Nature Kids, which is vital for us all to remember: Kids need Nature. Nature Needs Kids.

Winnifred Fischer

The BC Nature Club Service Award

This Award is presented to a person or persons belonging to a member Club recognising their outstanding service at a local level.

Winnifred Fischer is highly deserving of a BC Nature Club Service Award. Although she has been an active club member for many years, it is for her exemplary activity as KNC Membership Manager that we are nominating her. Since she has fulfilled this role since 2013, her workload has increased considerably over this time with the implementation of BCN's provincial database. She



has handled the many changes with aplomb (asking many questions—but as Betty says, she always does it cheerfully!), and has done an excellent job of ensuring that all club membership information is accurate and current in the database. Detail oriented, she checks our billing information carefully—both to the benefit of BCN and our own club treasurer. At renewal time, she emails and phones individuals who are slow to respond to general notifications, providing gentle reminders. This helps to either keep members paid up or allows us to know why people might not be renewing; she then conveys this information to the board, so that we can improve service. In addition to being Membership Manager, Winnifred collects the mail from our post box, passes it on to whoever needs to have it, and attends all board meetings. Finally, she has taken on the job of opening up the hall for every club meeting (which also requires her to be responsible for the key!). This involves arriving at least 30 minutes early, starting the coffee, setting out tea bags, cream, sugar, and cups, as well as snacks for the meeting break. She keeps track of the donations made for these and maintains the stock. Then of course, she does this in reverse at the end of each meeting, ensuring that the dishes and kitchen are clean before leaving. KNC is VERY grateful for all Winnifred's efforts.

MERLIN BIRD ID: BIRDWATCHING WITH TECHNOLOGY

By Nancy Elliot *Nancy*

I remember driving to a summer birding survey in my 20s and listening repeatedly to bird songs on tape (yep, that old) and memorizing the various patterns. Birders would share mnemonics, like 'sweet sweet little more sweet' or 'Quick! Three beers!', as another way of memorizing bird song. When out in the field, if I didn't know which bird was singing, I would track it down. A time-consuming effort that was either rewarding or frustrating, depending on whether I was able to find the bird, sometimes high up in the canopy, or in a clump of willows. And that is how we learned bird song.

Birdwatching has seen a significant technological advance with the introduction of the Merlin Bird ID app. Developed by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, this innovative application is designed to assist bird enthusiasts of all levels to identify birds and deepen their understanding of avian life.

About Merlin

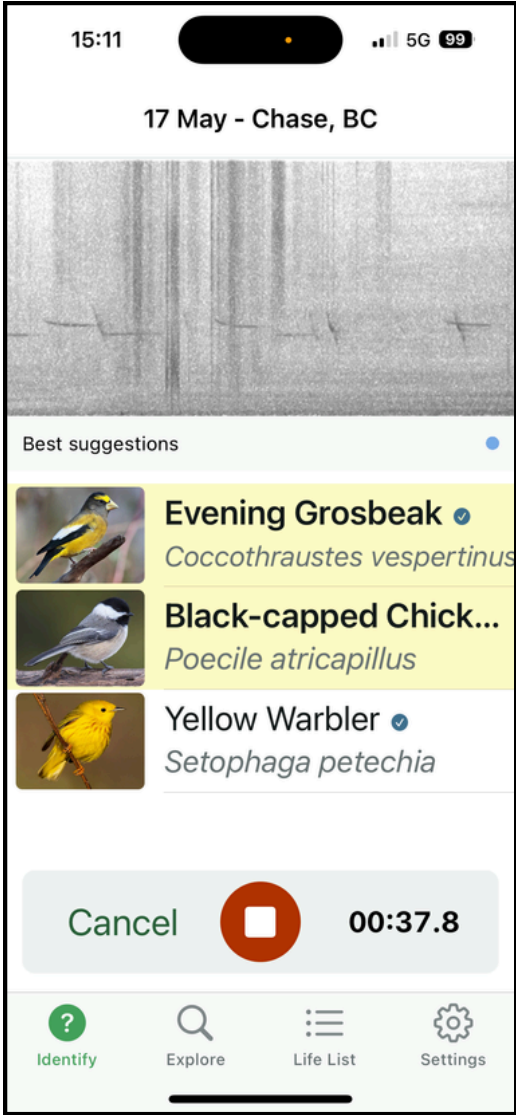
Merlin Bird ID is a free app available on both iOS and Android platforms. It leverages a vast database of bird species, alongside advanced machine learning algorithms, to provide bird identifications, largely through song, in real-time. The app has been lauded for its user-friendly interface, making it accessible to novice birdwatchers while still providing depth for more experienced users. Merlin supports bird identification, through sound or photo, or by stepping through identification by narrowing down size, colour, etc. Merlin also provides comprehensive information on individual bird species.

Birdwatchers can keep track of their sightings using Merlin's life list feature. This allows users to log each bird they've identified, creating a personal record of their birdwatching experiences. Additionally, the app can sync with eBird, another Cornell Lab project, to share sightings with a global birdwatching community.

The data collected through the app's integration with eBird contributes to scientific research. Bird sightings reported by users help scientists track migration patterns, population changes, and the effects of environmental changes on bird species. This citizen science aspect of Merlin Bird ID underscores its importance beyond just a recreational tool. (Any unusual sightings on eBird are reviewed by local experts).

By making bird identification accessible and straightforward, Merlin has opened up birding to people who would not have been interested before. I have more than one friend who regularly send me screenshots of their Merlin 'playlists'. In this way, Merlin is doing much to democratize birding.

One of the things I am really enjoying about Merlin is identifying and learning other calls and bits of song that I didn't know - each spring it seems that I learn the repertoires of more species. Birds are quite amazing! This spring I learned a set of call notes that I had no idea were made by American Goldfinches. One of my first birding mentors told me he could hear only the gulp of air that a Common Nighthawk



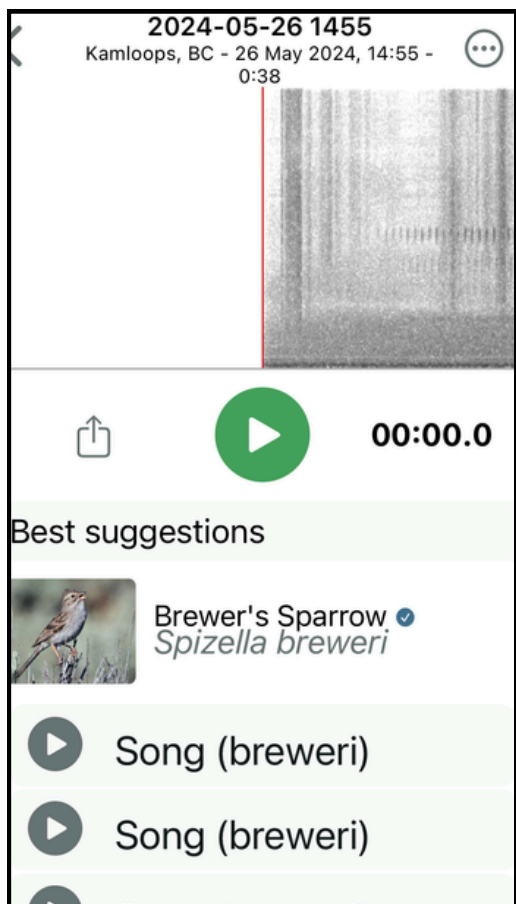
Above: Layout. You can setup Merlin so vocally active birds go to the top of the list, and are highlighted.

took before making its characteristic 'peent' because hearing loss had limited the range of his hearing. I think that Merlin and future apps might be great for supporting the enjoyment of birds among those who are faced with such challenges.

Full caveat, I am still figuring out how to best use Merlin because I estimate it is about 80% accurate. Merlin sometimes displays what I categorize as both 'omission' and 'commission' errors. Omission means sometimes a bird is singing, sometimes quite close, and it doesn't pick up on it. If you know which bird is singing you can tell that Merlin misses it. I'm not sure why this happens - could be a mismatch between the recording device and the environment at that time or simply background ambient noise.

'Commission' errors are when Merlin incorrectly identifies a bird. This can be more obvious, like the Chipping Sparrow that Merlin identified as Brewer's Sparrow near Cinnamon Ridge, or the Lazuli Bunting near Tranquille Creek that Merlin identifies consistently as an Indigo Bunting. Neither a Brewer's Sparrow nor an Indigo Bunting are truly impossible (is any bird really impossible?) but both are highly unlikely, and the best way to make sure was to track down the singing birds (which I do regularly - very old school!) and identify them by sight. I used to think that if Merlin repeatedly identified a bird it was probably accurate, but I have since learned that it would identify that darn Chipping Sparrow out at Cinnamon Ridge as a Brewer's Sparrow all day long. So if you aren't sure, get a look at the bird!

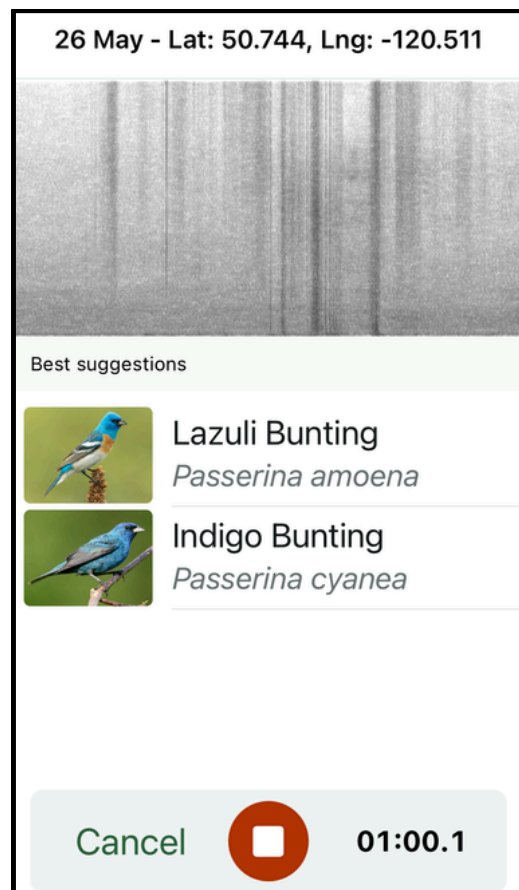
Despite some limitations, Merlin Bird ID is an indispensable companion on your birdwatching adventures.



Left: The Brewer's Sparrow that wasn't. I tracked down this 'Brewer's Sparrow', which sounded like a Chipping Sparrow to my ears, and when I saw it sing, was clearly a Chipping Sparrow. Something about this particular bird (at the Cinnamon Ridge Trailhead) has Merlin identifying it as a Brewer's Sparrow.

Below: Lazuli Bunting: photograph of a Lazuli Bunting Merlin consistently identifies as an Indigo Bunting.

Right: the readout on Merlin app - unsure whether it is an Indigo or Lazuli Bunting.



MOREL MUSHROOM SEASON

By Tori Verkaik

Tori

Well, 'tis the season—not Christmas, but rather the emergence of a type of small fungi known as morel mushrooms. While I'm not a mycologist and can't delve too deeply into these mushrooms, they've been a focal point of my work as a forester for several years. Morels have become crucial in early wildfire recovery efforts. They typically emerge the year following a wildfire. However, not every wildfire creates a suitable habitat for morels. The ideal conditions occur when a fire burns later in the summer at higher intensity, resulting in tree mortality. Morels are saprophytic, meaning they thrive on decaying organic matter—in this case, dead trees. They require ample mineral soil with a steady groundwater flow and tend to favour slopes facing east, south, and west.



One reason these mushrooms have sparked considerable interest is the rise of mushroom harvesters and buyers. With the severe wildfire seasons experienced in BC over recent years, the non-timber forest product industry has faced scrutiny. Like any industry, there have been challenges, notably, significant waste left behind by mushroom hunters in pursuit of the next morel. Despite these concerns, some operations have collaborated with the industry to protect impacted ecosystems. For instance, the Elephant Hill Wildfire Morel Mushroom program in 2018, led by several First Nation communities, established a permitting system to manage campsites and waste disposal for harvesters. Similarly, in 2022, Skeetchestn Indian Band implemented a comparable initiative following the Sparks Lake Wildfire. These programs exemplify efforts to balance economic opportunities with ecosystem conservation.