



SAGE WHISPERS

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



Pygmy Owl by Dave Whiting, taken during the Christmas Bird Count (see pg. 10!)



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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.

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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

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Find us Online!

kamloopsnaturalistclub.com

or

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PROGRAMS

Events:

March 14: Thrive Conference: TRU Grand Hall. 9 am to 4 pm

May 22-24: BC Nature AGM in Merritt

Meetings:

AGM! Saturday, January 25, 5:30 to 8:00 pm at St. Paul's Cathedral

February 20: Sandra Jasinowski. *It's Not Easy Being Green: Revitalizing and climate-proofing TRU's green roof.*

The semi-arid climate of Kamloops, with large seasonal temperature fluctuations and low rainfall, poses many environmental challenges for a green roof that are further exacerbated by climate change. Our goal is to revitalize the sloped green roof at Thompson Rivers University (est. 2010) to make it more climate resilient to extreme weather events and prolonged drought. Our investigations revealed deficiencies in the green roof components and the non-native grasses were not thriving. Our project uses a collaborative and holistic approach to identify and test drought-tolerant plants that are suitable for a harsh environment and can withstand future heat-related events and rising temperatures.

Dr. Sandra Jasinowski is a Research Associate in the Faculty of Science at TRU. She is also managing an interdisciplinary project, funded by a TRU Sustainability Grant, to investigate and implement green technology solutions on two buildings at TRU, including revitalizing and climate-proofing the green roof on the House of Learning. Sandra is currently looking for additional opportunities to provide tangible solutions to increase sustainability in Kamloops.

March 20: Jacqueline Schoen. *Short-Term Impacts of the Site C Dam on a Declining Aerial Insectivore: The Bank Swallow*

Hydroelectricity is one of the largest sources of renewable energy globally, and currently generates the majority of Canadian power. However, dams reduce water velocity slowing down erosion processes, reduce the availability of low-lying wetlands for foraging, and likely lead to accumulation of heavy metals in the environment. The Peace River is the site for BC Hydro's third hydroelectric project, Site C dam. The Peace is also home to one of the largest populations of Bank Swallows in the province, with...

an estimated 60+ breeding colonies and over 1,700 nests. Bank Swallows are Threatened in Canada under the federal Species at Risk Act; since the 1970s, Bank Swallow populations have declined in Canada by over 90%. During the 2021 and 2023 breeding seasons, 212 feather and 195 blood samples were collected from 22 colonies, both upstream and downstream of the site C dam construction. Using these samples, we have compared how Bank Swallow diet quality has changed both over time and spatially in relation to the dam construction, and whether heavy metals are being bioaccumulated in the population. Overall, we are exploring how the cumulative effects of this dam may alter the environment and consequently affect the health, survival, and fitness of this threatened species.

April 17: Catherine Tarasoff. *How to reduce reed canary grass*

May 15: Scott Boswel (OCCP), Danielle Toperczer (TNCC) and Michael Bezener (OCCP/TNCC). *Linking the Okanagan and Thompson-Nicola Watersheds through Collaborative Habitat Connectivity*

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!

The Kamloops Naturalist Club has already welcomed over twenty new members for 2025. Please send them a warm welcome:

Amanda Bond, Shelley Church, Olga Collins, Chantelle Davis, Alexandra Francis, Andrew Klassen, Brian Grant, Liz Hargreaves, Marilyn Hannis, Barb Hetherington, Josie Howitt & Family, Aria Kanazawa, Ian Longiaru, Emily Main, Sharon Munk, Larry Johannesen, Donna-Marie Olsen, Susan Omelchuck, Robert Prins & Pamela Dalglish.

PRESIDENT'S REVIEW 2024

By Nancy Flood *Nancy*

Wow, it's already time for the President's review of 2024. How the months fly when you are having fun! And I'd say we did have fun indeed this year—with a side of serious work and thought mixed in, of course.

As usual, we had some great speakers as anchors to our monthly meetings. After the AGM in January, Shae Turner told us about feather moult and the winter ecology of migratory birds—including some of the ones that breed here but wintered—with Shae—in Jamaica. In March, as we got ready for planting season, Master Gardener Megan Blackmore explored how to integrate native plants into our home gardens: a great way to increase wildlife habitat, reduce water use, and bring more beauty into the world! In April, Indigenous scholar and retired professional forester Michael Blackstock told us about "Blue Ecology" —his theory that water is, and affects, more than we think—and offered ideas on actions we can take to ensure that future generations have enough of it. In May, Liliana Ortega, Thompson-Okanagan coordinator for the BC Community Bat Program (<https://bcbats.ca/got-bats/>), gave us an update on what is going

EXECUTIVE & OFFICERS

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Past President

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Secretary

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BC Nature Director

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Winnifred Fischer

Newsletter

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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

on with bats in this area, including a project examining whether roll shutters are a hazard to these small mammals.

After a summer break, we were back to meetings in September, with a fantastic talk by TRU student Olivier Jumeau, called Bears, Bikes and Ski Hills: who knew finding, collecting and studying bears scat could be so much fun? October's talk was by TRU prof Emily Studd, about her past and ongoing research on boreal mammals (especially Lynx), much of it done in Kluane. Her focus was how various types of technology make new discoveries possible. As usual, in November we invited five current TRU master's students to discuss their research projects: they talked about everything from bighorn sheep, fishers, and chinook salmon to the effect of wildfire on stream ecology and the value of wildlife as seen through a lens of BC Wildlife Park visitors. The presentations were fantastic, the audience asked great questions, and as usual everyone came away having learned something new.

Of course, we also do lots of things outdoors, some just for fun, and others to collect data—or trash. A summary list must start, as always with the Rick Howie BC Interior Swan and Eagle Count in January (thanks Rich Doucette). In March, many of us accompanied Frank Ritcey on a “Ramble in Lac Du Bois (LdB).” In April, we joined the GCC and other groups for the LdB Spring Clean up. In May, 30 hardy birders took part in the Ralph Ritcey Big Bird Day (South won) and in early June we held the Spring version of a clean up on Tranquille—our adopted road. At the annual June picnic, more than 25 KNC folks “floated into summer” (a Julie Schooling quote) on Paul Lake. Many thanks to Jean Crowe and her neighbours whose boats took us on a delightful late afternoon tour! In July, we had our annual trip up Greenstone Mountain and in September we participated in BC River's Day, holding another clean up along Tranquille Rd and doing major work in the Tranquille Pond area, in our campaign against reed canary grass. The Christmas Bird Count in December saw people out both with the Nature Kids and in the main count organized by Glenn Dreger. Throughout the year, club members led trips and/or shared their expertise with the community via courses/events offered by the City of Kamloops or the Kamloops Adult Learner Society.

And of course our biggest, mostly-outdoor event this year was the Wells Gray camp, organized in cooperation with BC Nature. Spanning from a Thursday night to Sunday noon in May, this brought 21 campers from all over BC to the TRU Research and Education Centre, where they enjoyed interesting speakers, wonderful guided hikes all over Wells Gray Park, great food, and good company. Thanks to an organizing team of Joy Gothard, Chelsea Enslow, Julie Schooling and Gary Hunt (and me), we managed to learn a lot, have fun, demonstrate the renewed viability of BC Nature Camps and raise some money for both KNC and BCN. You can read lots more about this in our Fall newsletter (1). I do wish that we had more field trips! If you have any ideas or want to volunteer to lead one, feel free to contact Tom Dickinson (tdickinson@tru.ca) or Bob Needham (bobneedham@shaw.ca).

As always, we have lot of projects on the go—most led by our intrepid Project Manager, Jesse Ritcey—that often involve KNC summer students and/or club volunteers. There's the ongoing reed canary grass elimination experiment and well as continuing long-term work for the viewing platform at Tranquille pond. This year we focussed on developing plans for the parking lot—including spaces for learning as well as car and bus parking. We worked on saving native trees and getting rid of invasives in the area and we are looking forward to putting out bird boxes and bat roosting structures in the spring. We finished up a 3 year project working with the Off Road Vehicle (ORV) Association of BC, Recreational and Trails, BC, TRU and Tkemlúps te Secwépemc (TteS) using a large grant from the federal government to do things in the ORV, including installing signage and fencing around various fragile ponds, collecting and planting native seeds, doing species inventories and water quality analyses, and restoring a pond for spadefoots. You can read more about all of this in our Spring Newsletter (2) and in (3). We did ongoing work at Red Hill in LdB monitoring experimental treatments for control of Japanese brome, doing a survival study of pasture sage and...

planting blue bunch wheat grass to try and hide vehicle tracks. We continued working with the GCC, BC Parks and TteS to install signage at 9.5 km in LdB. And there is the ongoing THRIVE project, funded by Heritage Canada, which you can read about in the Spring Newsletter. As part of this, In March, adult clients of Kamloops Immigrant Services (KIS) enjoyed a medicine-making workshop with a TteS elder, and from March to August, KIS kids enjoyed 10 field trips to various interesting locations in the Kamloops area. In November and December, Nancy and Rich Doucette worked with UBC interns to organize and input the many years of Swan and Eagle count data to NatureCounts, an online platform maintained by Birds Canada. They will thus be safe and available for future study by anyone.

One of the highlights of any year for many KNCers is attending the BCN AGM in May. This year's meeting was no exception; we enjoyed great hospitality, wonderful field trips, and interesting speakers, all organized by the Arrowsmith Naturalists. Two of our members were particularly honoured during the meeting: Winnifred Fischer, who received a BCN Club Service award, and Mandy Ross, who received the Daphne Solecki Award for her contributions to the nature education for children in BC. This year's meeting, organized by our friends the Nicola Naturalists, is close by, in Merritt; it looks like it will be equally fun and educational. I urge you to check it out—registration is open and field trips are already filling up (4)!

1. <https://kamloopsnaturalistclub.com/fall-newsletter/>
2. <https://kamloopsnaturalistclub.com/sage-whispers-newsletter-spring-2024/>
3. <https://kamloopsnaturalistclub.com/news/a-spadefoot-toad-breeding-pond/>
4. <https://bcnature.org/2025-bc-nature-conference-and-agm/>

OUR MEMBERS: BECKY MONROE

Hello Everyone,

I am thrilled to join the Kamloops Naturalist Club as your new Secretary. My husband and I relocated to the Kamloops area in March 2024 after spending nearly nine years in Melbourne, Australia. Prior to that, we lived in Calgary, where we enjoyed backpacking and cross country skiing in the Rocky Mountains.

During our time in Australia, we developed a deep interest in birdwatching, exploring the diverse avifauna the country has to offer. Australia boasts over 800 bird species, and our passion for birding grew with each adventure. We are excited to bring this enthusiasm to our new home in Kamloops and look forward to discovering the local wildlife and natural beauty.

I am eager to contribute to the club and support its activities and initiatives.

Becky



ENGAGING KAMLOOPS IN GRASSLANDS EDUCATION: GCC'S COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

By Heidi Wismath

Heidi

The Grasslands Conservation Council of BC (GCC) is actively working to connect Kamloops residents with our precious grassland ecosystems through innovative educational programs. Our initiatives span from early childhood to community education, making grasslands education accessible to people of all ages.

Why Grasslands Matter

BC's grasslands are critically important yet threatened ecosystems. While covering less than 1% of BC's land base, they support a remarkable 30% of BC's species at risk, provide essential services and are rich in biodiversity.

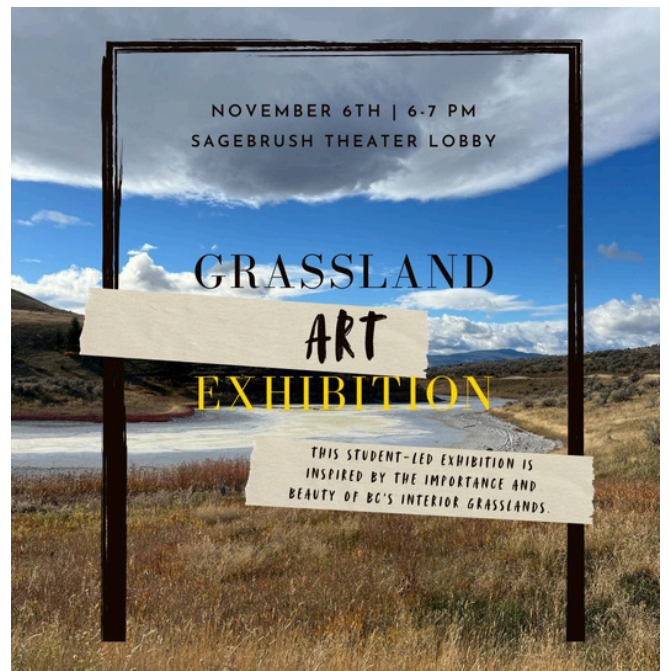
Why Educate Youth

Engaging students in grassland education offers multiple benefits. Because of the many roles they play, grasslands offer a perfect context for understanding issues related to climate change, conservation, and sustainability. Through hands-on experience with ecological concepts, students gain practical environmental science knowledge while building meaningful connections to their local environment.

Education events that occur outside naturally improve student engagement and concept retention, while allowing active participation in citizen science and conservation projects. The interdisciplinary nature of grasslands education creates valuable cross-curricular opportunities, connecting science with history, Indigenous/Traditional Ecological Knowledge, and social science. In understanding grasslands, students develop environmental stewardship skills and a deeper appreciation for their local landscape.

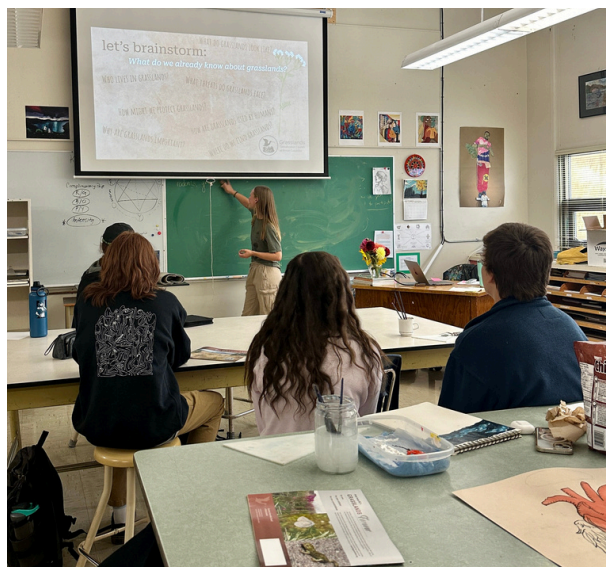
Educational Support and Programs

The GCC is making grassland education more accessible in the BC Interior by providing funding for facilitators and required materials. Our workshops cover key topics like species at risk, invasive species, and local grassland ecology. We deliver sessions in multiple formats—from online and classroom learning to interpretive walks and nature journaling in the grasslands.



Interdisciplinarity in Action: VISA at SKSS

A recent collaboration with South Kamloops Secondary School's Visual Arts program demonstrates our commitment to innovative education. Students combined what they learned about grasslands with artistic expression, culminating in a successful exhibition that featured their artworks in the foyer of the Sagebrush Theatre. The students raised funds for the program by selling calendars and postcards featuring several of the art pieces.



New: Early Learning Resource Box

We're excited to announce our new Grasslands Early Learning Resource Box, soon to be available through the Child Care Resource and Referral (CCRR) service at the Kamloops YMCA. This educational treasure-trove helps child care providers and families with young children explore and learn about our local grasslands through age-appropriate activities and materials. It's never too early to foster a connection with nature!

Up Next

In 2025, the GCC looks forward to growing roots in the Okanagan, strengthening our partnerships in the Thompson Nicola, and serving grassland communities throughout the province.

For more information about our programs or to schedule a session, we encourage you to reach out to info@bcgrasslands.org. We're excited to work with you to create an educational experience that meets your specific needs!

CROWS IN THE OAKS

By Alan Vyse

Alan

Frances and I went on one of our frequent visits to Riverside Park at the end of September. We parked at the west end by the tennis courts and sauntered down the shaded paths to the viewpoint over the river. Looking over the river, I was surprised by how high the river had risen since our last visit a week earlier. The sandbanks exposed in the summer drought had vanished under the rising waters and the North Thompson was flowing fast. The rain must have been very heavy in the northern watershed to cause such a rapid change. As I turned away from the river my ears picked up the raucous noise of American crows. There were at least a hundred of them flying over the beach. As we walked further east, we could see many more crows racketing around in the corner of the park opposite the hockey palace. Caw-Caw, Caw-Caw, the calls were incessant.



What was provoking the commotion? Going closer we could see crows everywhere: in the air, on the grass and clustered in the trees. A few of the birds on the grass appeared to be holding something in their beaks. And then I trod on an acorn. The crows were eating, or at least attempting to eat, acorns...



from a group of large red oak trees. Standing beneath the trees was mildly hazardous because the birds were walking along the branches dropping, or shaking loose, acorns and there was a steady rain of little brown bombs. We could hear pop, pop, pop as they fell into the grass. I'm not sure if the birds were rejecting unripe acorns but I did see crows on the ground bashing acorns with their beaks, presumably intending to break the fruit into more palatable portions. Looking carefully, we could see that many discarded acorns showed signs of attempted consumption, but with such a profuse crop there would have been few disappointed birds.

To our surprise, we were watching the crows taking advantage of a “mast”, or abundant, acorn crop. The red oaks were feeding the crows, and the crows were, in turn, disseminating the progeny of the oaks, although those crows would have needed an aggressive digestive system to deal with the bullet-hard acorns. Mast is an old English term for the seeds of trees such as oak and beech which, when they fall on the ground, are available for feeding pigs and other animals. The term “masting” is used to describe the irregular occurrence of abundant seed crops in broadleaved and coniferous trees and even shrubs and grasses over a large area.

On our way back to the car, I mused about the phenomenon of masting and how it occurs in our native interior spruce and Douglas-fir. In 2022, for example, there was a huge crop of spruce seed across a wide swath of the southern interior. The top branches of interior spruce trees along the Lac Le Jeune road were bowed over, so heavy was their load of cones. These masting events can extend for thousands of kilometres. One year about twenty years ago, there were spruce trees masting from the Coast Mountains to Saskatchewan. The reasons behind masting are not well understood but recent research from Europe suggests mast crops occur when the summer temperatures are higher than normal.

As we passed by the tennis courts I was startled from my musing when I heard the familiar “bop bop” from the pickle ball practitioners, and I noted, rather grumpily I fear, that I prefer the “pop-pop” sound of falling acorns.

CREATING A SPADEFOOT TOAD BREEDING POND

By Jesse Ritcey

Jesse

This summer we wrapped up a three year project to enhance habitat and better protect species-at-risk in the designated Off Road Vehicle Area of Lac Du Bois.

For this project we partnered with the Four Wheel Drive Association of BC, through their local rep Charlie Denbigh, and successfully applied for funding from Environment and Climate Change Canada's Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk.



We worked with the 4x4 crew to fence off several unique saline pond features and a fresh water duck pond, while putting up educational signage for drivers to enjoy. We share a goal of fostering greater stewardship of the area, as awareness increases of the many amazing species that call this area home.

At the same time, local biologist Brianna Powrie prepared a plan to inventory key habitat areas in the ORV. We knew great basin spadefoot were here, so she brought in Jo-Anne Hales, a spadefoot toad researcher and T'keklúps te Secwépemc band member, to analyze audio recordings and survey which areas the toads were using to breed. A small valley was located with some ephemeral ponds, but due to drought in recent years, and the long term impacts of climate change, they worried these ponds may be drying up before tadpoles could finish maturing.

Tay Powrie, a TRU MSc student studying hydrology, looked at the movement of water through the valley and devised a plan to use pool liner to collect and trap water into one area, that would last long enough into the summer that the spadefoot tadpoles could finish their metamorphosis.

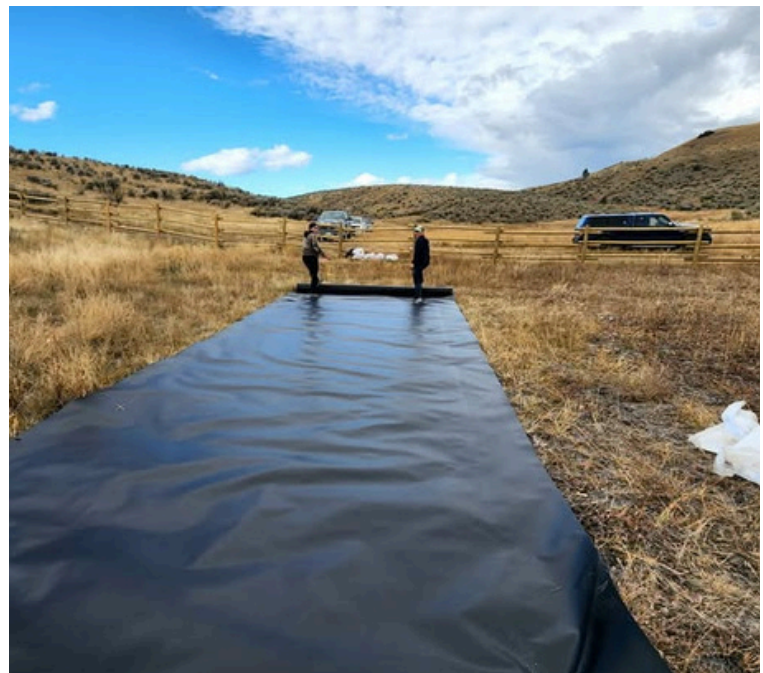
TRU student Dani Lafleur and I learned about plant species that are adapted to grow in these pond areas. We collected seeds and worked with the TteS greenhouse to grow hundreds of plugs of these species. After the pond was installed, we used these plants to restore the area and make the artificial pond as close to a natural environment as possible.

By next summer we will know if the pond holds water and the spadefoot toads are using it. **Fingers crossed!**

Many thanks to all the TRU students, KNC employees and volunteers, BC Parks, and Grasslands Conservation Council of British Columbia for various contributions to this project.



Above: red glasswort (*Salicornia rubra*) and the fluffy seed heads of ray-less alkali aster (*Symphyotrichum ciliatum*).



Above: rolling out sections of liner for the pond. The split rail fencing is intended to prevent vehicles in this sensitive area.



Above: bluebunch wheatgrass seedlings and other native plant seed are used to restore the disturbed upland habitat.

2024 CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

By Glenn Dreger

Glenn

On December 14th, the 2024 Kamloops Christmas Bird Count was conducted by 43 of our members divided into 21 groups with 3 more members on feeder watches. Temperatures were mild and winds were light. A total of 8472 individual birds were counted. Seventy-two species were seen, although the official CBC count will be 70, as 2 of the species seen were within the count window, but not on the day. They are, therefore, recorded but not as part of the CBC. The 2 species in the count window were a Great-horned Owl recorded by Bill Gilroy and 50 Snow Buntings recorded by Darrel Frolek.

The participants spent 73 hours on foot and 31 hours driving, covering 106 km on foot and 378 km by vehicle.

A list of the birds that were found is on the next page!

It appears that we are on the low end of counts over the past years. Counts of 77 species and over 13,000 individuals have been made, although 70 to 74 species is more usual with 10,000 birds counted.

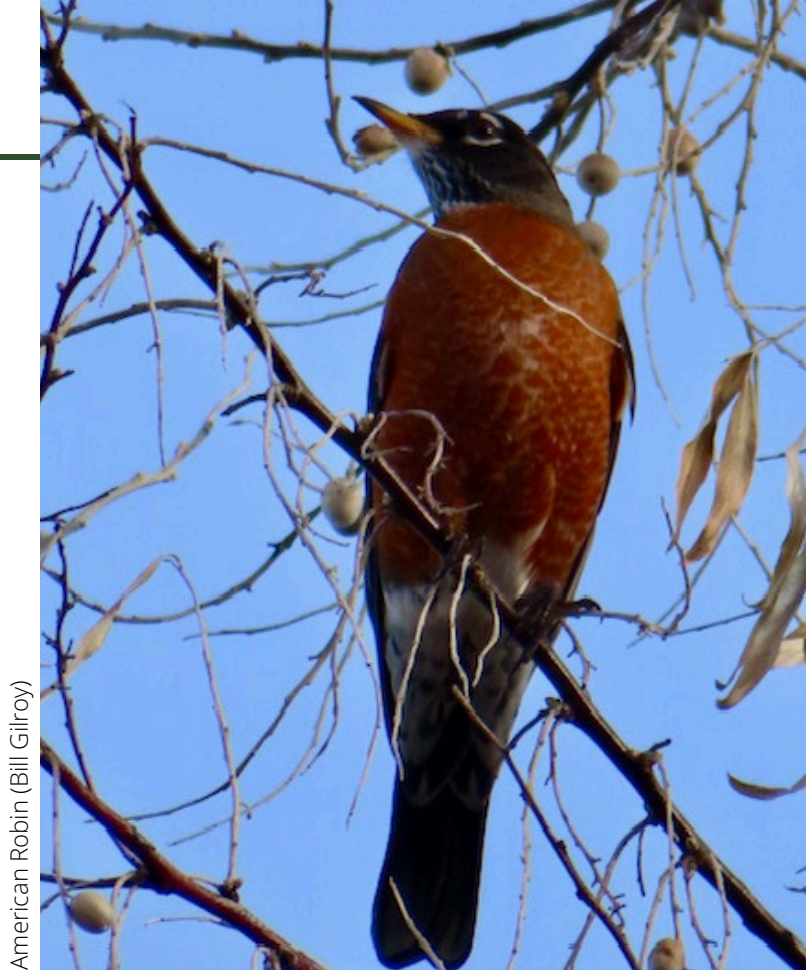
It has been a very mild year so far, which could explain some lower numbers. We usually count Bohemian Waxwings in the thousands, this year there were only 19 counted. No Redpolls, or Crossbills were seen.

Overall, I think our crew did an excellent job and our count is as should be expected for this year.

Clark's Nutcracker (Bill Gilroy)



Kamloops Naturalist Club Fall 2024



American Robin (Bill Gilroy)



Ruffed Grouse (Glenn Dreger)



Coopers Hawk (Teresa Corboy)

2024 CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT RESULTS!

| | | | |
|---------------------|------|-------------------------|------|
| Snow Goose | 1 | American Kestrel | 7 |
| Canada Goose | 3221 | Merlin | 6 |
| Trumpeter Swan | 8 | Northern Shrike | 3 |
| Tundra Swan | 18 | Steller's Jay | 8 |
| Gadwal | 1 | Black-billed Magpie | 146 |
| American Wigeon | 3 | Clark's Nutcracker | 10 |
| Mallard | 504 | American Crow | 289 |
| Northern Shoveller | 37 | Common Raven | 113 |
| Green-wing Teal | 10 | Horned Lark | 20 |
| Ring-necked Duck | 13 | Black-capped Chickadee | 92 |
| Redhead | 2 | Mountain Chickadee | 103 |
| Scaup (sp) | 70 | Red-breasted Nuthatch | 14 |
| Bufflehead | 18 | White-breasted Nuthatch | 9 |
| Common Goldeneye | 4 | Pygmy Nuthatch | 19 |
| Barrow's Goldeneye | 80 | Townsend's Solitaire | 12 |
| Hooded Merganser | 11 | Great-horned Owl (CW) | 1 |
| Common Merganser | 11 | Northern Pygmy Owl | 5 |
| Chukar | 5 | American Robin | 301 |
| Ruffed Grouse | 3 | European Starling | 1082 |
| Sharptail Grouse | 2 | Bohemian Waxwing | 19 |
| Common Loon | 2 | Dark-eyed Junco Oregon | 188 |
| Ring-billed Gull | 355 | Dark-eyed Junco Slate | 7 |
| Herring Gull | 6 | House Sparrow | 204 |
| Great Blue Heron | 1 | White-throated Sparrow | 1 |
| Northern Harrier | 3 | White-crowned Sparrow | 15 |
| Sharp-shinned Hawk | 3 | Song Sparrow | 26 |
| Cooper's Hawk | 2 | Spotted Towhee | 5 |
| Bald Eagle | 91 | Red-winged Blackbird | 93 |
| Red-tailed Hawk | 9 | Brewer's Blackbird | 7 |
| Rough-legged Hawk | 10 | Pine Grosbeak | 4 |
| American Coot | 1 | Evening Grosbeak | 23 |
| Belted Kingfisher | 1 | Snow Bunting (CW) | 50 |
| Downy Woodpecker | 13 | Pine Siskin | 15 |
| Hairy Woodpecker | 11 | House Finch | 221 |
| Northern Flicker | 104 | American Goldfinch | 226 |
| Pileated Woodpecker | 6 | Rock Pigeon | 415 |
| | | Eurasian Collared Dove | 151 |