

Spring 2026



SAGE WHISPERS

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



Sandhill Cranes at Douglas Lake (pg.9 !)

Photo by Dawn Brodie

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KNC is grateful to meet on the unceded land of Tkemlúps te Secwépemc, and to do most of our wandering and enjoying nature within Secwepemcúl'ecw, the traditional territory of the Secwépemc people. We are grateful for their stewardship of this land since time immemorial.



CLUB INFO

The Kamloops Naturalist Club was formed in 1971 and became a registered Society in 1981. It is a member of both 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 - \$30
Student - \$23
Contact: Winnifred Fischer
250.376.3944

Find Us Online!
kamloopsnaturalistclub.com
or
facebook.com/kamloopsnaturalistclub

PROGRAMS

Field Trips

June 4: Grasslands Conservation Council AGM and Field Trips: see the many events and excitement, here:

<https://bcgrasslands.org/agm/gcc-agm-2026-events-activities/>

June 13, 9am - 11 am.

Join us for a hike jointly sponsored by the Kamloops Naturalist Club and Juniper Ridge Community Association – a walk through the newly designated Juniper Ridge Grasslands Protected Area. The walk takes place on Saturday June 6, which is BC Trails Day! We hope to observe mountain bluebirds and meadowlarks, and observe native wildflowers including Thompson's paintbrush and silky lupine. We will meet at 9 am at the yellow gate at the end of Balsam Place in Juniper Ridge. Street parking is available nearby (but watch for the areas designated "no parking"). Map pin here: <https://maps.app.goo.gl/tF7gnUHATaz5LDtZ9>

The route is moderate in difficulty, following a well travelled, wide path for approximately 4 km (2.5 miles) long, with an elevation gain of 150 meters (500 feet). With breaks for snacks and observing wildlife, this should take us approximately 2 hours. Dress for the weather and bring appropriate footwear, snacks, water, sunblock, and binoculars (if desired). The nearest public washrooms are at the Juniper Ridge Park (next to the tennis courts).

Non members are welcome but will need to pay \$1 and sign a day membership/waiver form. For more information contact Diane McKelvey at mckelvey53@pm.me

Programs

June 18. June picnic. We will meet for carpooling at 4:45 at the cattleguard that is at the end of Bachelor Hills Drive, here:

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/uBPWM8yAaPfczLsm9>.

We will meet at 5 pm at Lac du Bois :

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/ZpQRD2kEWvksisnQ8>

Cori Dixon will lead a walk to look for butterflies. This is an excellent area to see a variety of species. Please bring your dinner and a chair. A short business meeting will follow the walk. Details are also available on the KNC website.

Welcome New Members!

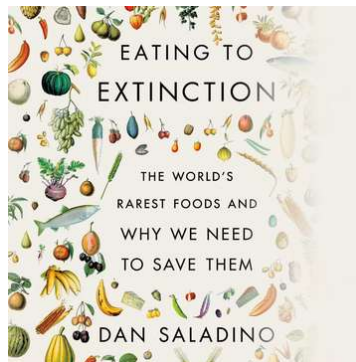
The Kamloops Naturalist Club is welcoming the following new members for Spring 2026 Janis Anderson, Kristi Gordon & Timothy Finlay, Mag Grant, Hailey-Jean Johnson, Sasha Mackinnon, Shelly-ann McIvor & Dean Jaeger, Jule-Anne McKenny, Susan & Olegsiy Nechai, Pamela Piccini, Elizabeth & Gerald Reichenback, Massi Valiante, and Christina Walkden.

EATING TO EXTINCTION - BOOK REVIEW

By Tom Dickinson

Tom

As the aromas of Christmas dinner wafted into the living room, I unwrapped a present with my name on it. Immediately, I knew that it came from someone who knew both my love of food and my passion for wild things. My present was Dan Saladino's book *Eating to Extinction*, and it hit the mark squarely on both of these interests. Saladino is a widely recognized BBC food journalist who has travelled the world to record the stories of foods and human cultures at risk of extinction. His book takes you on a global journey with stories of people and food traditions that are central to their ways of life. His book documents the risk of disappearing faced by many biological species/ varieties and the cultures that have derived from them.



Dan Saladino, 2021 Picador, New York 450 pp + xix

His book's menu is organized into thirty-four chapters each of which focuses on a food tradition that is closely anchored to the culture from which it derives. The meal begins with "Wild foods", such as honey foraged by hunter-gatherers with the aid of birds called honeyguides. For the people involved, colonization has brought agriculture to the wild lands and has displaced them and their traditional foods to the margins. This story repeats through much of the book with examples of the loss of varieties of wheat, potatoes, chickens, bananas, cheeses, and much more. Not only are the original species becoming endangered, but so too are the culinary techniques used to make the foods, many of which allowed past cultures to flourish. With only minor twists, this same story holds true for alcoholic beers, teas and sweets. Not only has the immediate impact of colonization created enormous threats to biological and cultural diversity, but so too have wars, political ideologies and economic greed.

Saladino is an accomplished storyteller. His personal experiences and careful research have allowed him to beautifully describe the foods and how people prepare them, as well as how they taste! I particularly enjoyed Saladino's descriptions of the techniques that are associated with producing some foods and drinks. But the same message is repeatedly reflected through all of his chapters: economics drives the production of an increasingly limited number of varieties of foods (the most productive ones) and genetic bottlenecks ensue. As a result, diverse breeds and varieties that have been selected over millennia for adaptations to local environments disappear. The result is a world of monocultures that is at an ever-increasing risk to rapidly evolving diseases and a changing climate.

I found Saladino's stories of committed and often courageous individuals working to change this trajectory inspiring. Kudos to the people who are working to make sure some of the most iconic but endangered foods survive. His epilogue provides a clear message for all of us: for our food systems and for the whole natural world, it is increasingly important that we intentionally protect diversity. For me, that will be through continuing my commitment to local food producers, to planting and eating heritage varieties, and whenever possible to shop in local farmers' markets.

Kamloops Naturalist Club Spring 2026

EXECUTIVE & OFFICERS

President

Diane McKelvey

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Vacant

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Chelsea Enslow

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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

GRASSLAND PONDS

By Nancy Elliot

Nancy

I've been tracking grassland ponds for ~4 years and the trend is clear: they're shrinking. This spring, levels appear to have dropped sharply. We're now in year four of persistent drought and if one looks closer the change is unmistakable.

In grasslands, spring rain supports plant growth, but many ponds depend on snowmelt runoff to fill and persist. Climate forecasters are flagging a shift from La Niña to El Niño later this summer, typically meaning a move in B.C. from colder, wetter conditions to warmer, drier ones. A strong El Niño could accelerate the drying already underway in grasslands and at lower elevations. Warmer conditions at low elevations can translate into slightly warmer and even snowier mountains and resultant increase in the snowpack may boost rivers later in spring, but it does little for isolated grassland ponds that rely on localized runoff.

Weather cycles do shift, and snow could return to these grasslands and fill the ponds again. But the question remains: by the time it does, will these ponds still function as the same habitat? Further, is a "hotter and drier" grassland becoming the new baseline, and what will that mean for ponds and the species that depend on them?

Not all ponds function the same, and that matters when conditions get dry:



Swans on Grace Lake

- *Perched ponds* are isolated from groundwater and other water. They rely almost entirely on snowmelt and precipitation. By mid- to late- summer, high evaporation often leaves behind alkaline "salt rings," and species like red saltwort (*Salicornia rubra*) turn vivid red. Some perched ponds sit above impermeable layers like clay. If that layer is disturbed or punctured, the pond can drain rapidly and permanently.
- *Connected ponds* are linked to groundwater or broader hydrological systems. They are generally more stable but still show stress when the entire system is drying. The size of the pond may matter as well, with larger ponds faring better.
- Additionally, vegetation changes across the landscape are altering how water reaches ponds. Tree encroachment at higher elevations (within the same hydrological system) can intercept precipitation that would otherwise flow downslope into grassland ponds. Evidence of this comes from large wildfires: when surrounding vegetation is removed, water levels in nearby grassland and open forest ponds often rise in subsequent years. This response is partly linked to hydrophobic soil conditions after fire, which limit water infiltration and increase surface runoff. The spread of sagebrush in lower-elevation grasslands also likely reduces the amount of water reaching ponds by capturing and using moisture that would otherwise contribute to pond recharge.
- Work by Aaron Coehlo and Andrew Pantel (see links) discusses perched vs connected ponds, and suggests looking at pond size as a measure that might help us predict which ones will survive a new drier baseline.

Bottom line: perched ponds live or die by snowpack, and lately, they're losing.

The impacts are already visible. Ponds that once held birds are dry and empty. Tranquille Pond on Ord Road, usually alive with ducks and pelicans, was dry early this spring. Some birds appear to be shifting to slightly higher elevations, (e.g., in Lac du Bois), but even those ponds, especially perched ones, are disappearing.



Places I named for what once bred there, for example “Ruddy Duck Pond” or Teal Pond”, are now dry, overgrown, or gone. Even Batchelor Pond at the base of Lac Du Bois Road isn’t what it used to be and is dry without snow runoff.

So here’s the hard truth: you don’t know what you have until it’s gone—and by the time we notice, the landscape has already rewritten the rules.

What have you noticed that is changing across the landscape with grassland ponds?

Links of interest:

Snow Water Survey:

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/air-land-water/water/drought-flooding-dikes-dams/river-forecast-centre/snow-survey-water-supply-bulletin>

Identifying and categorized pond types based on the groundwater connection near the city of Kamloops, BC

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/b910e0bec7c843abaf5fc8b6a6538f27>

Climate Change Impact Risk Assessment Tool for Ponds Used as Livestock Water Sources

<https://bcclimatchangeadaptation.ca/app/uploads/FI10-Ponds-as-Livestock-Water-Sources-2017-report.pdf>

Aaron Coelho thesis:

https://www.tru.ca/_shared/assets/Coelho_thesis34900.pdf



OUR VALUED VOLUNTEERS: WHAT MOTIVATES THEM?

By Diane McKelvey

Diane

I have to start with a confession – it was with some trepidation that I volunteered to accept the position of President of the Kamloops Naturalist Club in January of this year. Not did the job seem so big, but it meant following in the steps of Nancy Flood as she stepped down after 8 years as President. Nancy is a legend in the world of nature conservation in BC as a tireless leader not only of the Kamloops Naturalist Club, but also of BC Nature. It was Nancy's support, and the encouragement of the KNC Executive and our incredibly competent Program Manager, Jesse Ritcey, that gave me the courage to take on this challenge.

This got me thinking – why do we do this? Why do so many people volunteer to help out the club? This includes not only the hard-working Executive, but also the field trip leaders, web masters and social media posters, newsletter contributors, membership trackers, coffee makers, road clean-up participants, grassland restorers, and others without whom the Club could not function.

So I conducted a poll of our Executive members: Why you do this? And here are the answers: One Past-President commented: "In the face of world events I can't control, nature is a balm. Protecting and restoring it is a gift to my kids and their kids. It's deeply fulfilling to work with like-minded volunteers on the KNC Board to celebrate the natural world and counteract nature-deficit disorder within our community."

Another tireless volunteer said: "I volunteer with the Kamloops Naturalist Club to connect with my community and share my love of birdwatching. It's a meaningful way to give back to nature while learning about the challenges it faces and how we can be its voice."

A newer member of the Executive wrote: "My true passions are hiking, bird watching, and being outdoors. I have always found like-minded people in various Naturalists' clubs. I hope to contribute meaningfully by creating some good experiences for others."

A long-term volunteer said: "I have a deep appreciation for nature and a desire to help protect it. By volunteering with the club, I get to learn about and appreciate with others the natural world as well as contribute in my own small way to spreading awareness and protecting the environment."

An Executive member who participates in almost every event that we put on for the public gave me this comment: "I volunteer to be more involved and up to date with the range of opportunities the KNC offers. Although I may not be able to attend all types of activities, this helps open my eyes to what is available. I love talking with other like-minded naturalists, scientists, and learning from them. I am more of an ecologist than a birder so you will find me staring more at foliage and other fauna than staring at the skies."

And finally, from an Executive member who has an eye on the future: "I volunteer with the Naturalist Club and other organizations because I love it – I love nature, and love exploring, planning, and sharing experiences with others. I also really cherish opportunities I have had as a result of other people's volunteering, particularly when I was younger. Those early experiences were so important and helped me along the paths I still follow today. I also love to see how small actions in the community can transform restoration projects, raise awareness, and build community".

After reading these thoughtful comments, most of my apprehension has disappeared – in fact I now feel very privileged to be working with this amazingly dedicated group of people. And I know that many of you who read this newsletter understand and share the love of nature and community that these words encapsulate.

**Thank you, volunteers, for all that
you have done in the past and
continue to do!**

ABERDEEN CLIMATE CONNECTIONS WALK - SATURDAY, MARCH 7

By Joy Gothard and Sue Cane

Joy & Sue

We chose this walk along a 1.8 km paved loop trail because Kamloops Naturalist Club (KNC) members had submitted photos and content for the interpretive signs along the Climate Connections Trail—and because there are great views! The interpretive signs along the trail provide a bit of background on particular themes.



Thirteen members and three guests gathered under cloudy skies and came prepared with walking sticks, binoculars, and cameras. We met at the main parking lot of West Highlands Park, and continued along the loop trail. This loop trail was originally a cart trail established for the former Aberdeen Golf Club. The City of Kamloops has paved it, installed lighting and maintains it year-round. There is drinking water at the wheelchair accessible washrooms in the West Highlands Community Centre beside the parking lot.

We started our walk at the Community Gardens adjacent to the trail. Barb shared her experience of gardening and sharing crops with other gardeners. Even though this garden has a shorter growing season than most of Kamloops, her garden produces a wide variety of vegetables. Her favourite crop is carrots which last until March while stored in her fridge.

Heading East, we followed “the path of least resistance”. Most of the grasses are non-native species and a variety of weeds have been introduced along the trail. To the right was the first sighting of a piezometer, used for measuring groundwater levels, of which there are 103 distributed through the Aberdeen area. There are 30 wells installed and operating at selected locations in Aberdeen to help monitor soil stability. We identified saskatoon and snowberry bushes to the lower left of the trail, but they were not yet in leaf or bloom.

As our trail rose westward, we came to the “Local Climate Solutions” interpretive sign, which outlines the City’s Climate Commitment. KNC regularly holds the City accountable for this commitment. The clouds lifted, allowing expansive views that included Dufferin Hill, Thompson Rivers University, the North Thompson River, and Mt. Peter & Paul. On a clear day, Mt. Dunn, the highest peak in the Shuswap Highlands, can be seen from this area of the trail. The first of many rest benches became available near the top of this rise.



The next sign we came to was “Climate Ecosystem Connection”. KNC members, Jesse Ritcey, Nancy Flood and club photographers contributed most of the content of this interpretive sign. A covered picnic table is placed here to rest, read and contemplate



the view. An easy access to this part of the trail comes in from St. Andrews Way.

As we continued, Jesse pointed out an area of native grasses that appear to be surviving well, giving us hope that future plantings would revitalize the borders of the trail. A natural trail runs along the crest of the berm which provides nice views, but we avoided it due to coyote and bear sightings.

We paused on the bridge to read the Land Acknowledgement and Mindful Connections signs. While there was no sun on our adventure, past the bridge on the right, there is a pile of large rocks where marmots like to sun themselves. Here there was a tall barren pine that hosted a northern flicker.



Northern Flicker by Jesse Ritcey

The final set of signs include a Sk'elép (Coyote) teaching story, "Sk'elép Juggles His Eyes", and information about Secwépemc Seasonal Rounds. These include a traditional, intricate and sustainable system of travel, resource gathering and land use that corresponds with the ecological changes of the thirteen lunar months. This cycle allowed the Secwépemc people to move throughout their traditional territory, maximizing access to various resources, while ensuring the sustainability of the land.

On the final stretch, half the group stopped to identify Slender Wheatgrass. The other half looked at an area that has been identified as Spadefoot habitat. Park staff and volunteers have worked in this area of the trail to remove invasive weeds using both mechanical (machine or hand removal) and biological control (using insects). Guerin Creek has been diverted underground from above Pacific Way Elementary School. A ditch coming from the wetlands beside the community gardens directs water into the outflow culvert of Guerin Creek.

In the park we saw a few areas where Gina & Georgia Morris and the Kamloops Rotary Hybrid Interact group have been planting trees. An initial planting from four years ago had high mortality, but they learned as a result and a newer planting appeared more successful. They hand-water these trees, as irrigation in place along the fence line above is not sufficient to support them. On the opposite side of the trail is a mini urban forest project funded by TD Bank Group, where Kamloops City staff planted a variety of evergreens and shrubs with an extensive irrigation system. Which strategy to re-establish an urban forest will be successful? Time will tell.

Our walk ended near the pond by the parking lot. Red-winged Blackbirds called across the water and we searched for native pollinator plants inside a fenced native plant garden. The Aberdeen Neighbourhood Association, led by Helen Newmarch, funded planting native species here to support native pollinators. Jesse Ritcey gave information on cluster planting of species and other tips for increasing the survival of such plants. Native plants were purchased from Splitrock Environmental Nursery in Lillooet.

While there were no green leaves or blossoms on flowers, we did see American Robins, chickadees, Black-billed Magpies, American Crows and a Northern Flicker. A few days later using the "Merlin app", Sue identified House Finch, Song Sparrow, House Sparrow and Dark-eyed Junco.

Our advertised one-hour walk, turned into a two-hour walk of observations and great discussions.

Thanks everyone for joining and for your love of and care for nature!

DOUGLAS LAKE FIELD TRIP

Diane McKelvey *Diane*

About 30 people from the Kamloops Naturalist Club, the Nicola Naturalist Society, along with others from further afield, gathered together at Douglas Lake Ranch on the morning of April 18 for a celebration of Sandhill cranes and the grasslands. Our hosts were Loretta Holmes and Opal Charters from the Upper Nicola Band (*kwU StentimA/?*), BC Nature, and Douglas Lake Ranch.

The day began with an amazing opportunity to observe about 7500 Sandhill cranes. We found the cranes standing in a marsh just east of Douglas Lake. About fifteen minutes after we arrived the cranes took flight, and shortly after came to rest in a mowed field a couple of kilometers down the road. This gave us another opportunity to take photos and view the feeding cranes through the spotting scopes brought by several observers. After an hour or so, the air temperature had risen appreciably and the cranes lifted off and—vocalizing loudly—went in search of thermals that would help them fly the 100 km or so to reach their next overnight stop. We heard later that several thousand other cranes rested overnight at various locations on Douglas Ranch.

Our next stop was the installation ceremony for a sign celebrating the designation of the Douglas Lake Plateau as a Key Biodiversity Area. This designation has taken years to accomplish, and is thanks to the



Photo by Dawn Brodie



Photo by Dawn Brodie



Sandhill Cranes, photo by Dawn Brodie



Sandhill Cranes, photo by Dawn Brodie

partnership between BC Nature, the Upper Nicola Band, and Douglas Lake Ranch, and is a testament to the hard work of Liam Ragan, Gary Hunt, Rich Doucette, Alan Burger, the late Rick Howie and many others. The sign recognizes and celebrates the grasslands of Douglas Lake and surrounding area, which provide a home (or migration stop-over site) for rare and threatened species such as Burrowing Owls, Lewis' Woodpeckers and American Badgers, as well as a significant proportion of North America's Sandhill Crane population. The Key Biodiversity Area grasslands encompass a huge area, extending almost as far north as Kamloops.

Following a ceremonial welcome from Upper Nicola Band members, a permanent sign was unveiled, recognizing the importance of these grasslands in providing habitat for threatened wildlife species. The sign is located beside the road that follows the northwest side of Douglas lake, next to the old "Empire of Grass" sign. Following the unveiling, we adjourned to the church on the Douglas Lake Ranch and enjoyed a lunch provided by BC Nature.

It was a beautiful sunny spring day, and we were able to observe not only cranes but also many other bird species, as well as a lone coyote who wove his way (more or less peacefully) through the field of cranes.

A key biodiversity area indeed!



Sandhill Crane, Photo by the late Rick Howie



Sign Unveiling, photo by Dawn Brodie