

Summer 2026



SAGE WHISPERS

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



One of the many beautiful butterflies viewed on the butterfly walk (Melissa or Northern Blue) Photo by Cori Dixon

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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
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[accepting contributions!!](#)

KNC Mailing Address

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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 - \$30

Student - \$23

Contact: Winnifred Fischer
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Find Us Online!

kamloopsnaturalistclub.com

or

facebook.com/kamloopsnaturalistclub

PROGRAMS

Programs & Events

Meetings are paused for summer - See you (soon) in September!

Welcome New Members!

The Kamloops Naturalist Club is welcoming the following new members for Summer 2026 Carolyn Cotito, Leah Dagg, Alana DeBusschere, Justin Galea, Andreanne Gratton-Demers, Brianna & Andrew McCaffery, Erin Partridge, Madison Shea, and Kieran & Melody Van Wagoner.

The Kamloops Naturalist Club Newsletter is accepting contributions!

Have you always wanted to see your name in print? This might be your lucky year... we are accepting contributions for the quarterly newsletter!

If you have something interesting to teach our members about nature, some research - formal or informal - to share, or have some nature poetry, art, photography, or other inspirations or ideas, please get in touch!



HOW THE CLAY-COLOURED SPARROW CHANGED MY MENTAL MAP

By Nancy Elliot

Nancy

Clay Coloured Sparrow by Valerie Walsh



One of the pleasures of spending time in nature is that even after decades of observation, it can still surprise you.

I've been identifying birds by sound for many decades now, a realization that makes me feel a little old. Certain species become so closely associated with particular places that hearing them anywhere else can feel almost wrong. For me, one of those species is the Clay-coloured Sparrow.

The Clay-coloured Sparrow's song is distinctive: a dry, buzzy trill that carries surprisingly well across open country. In my mind, that sound belongs to the lower grasslands of Lac du Bois. That's where I've spent much of my spring birding time in recent

years: along the North Shore, at Tranquille, and throughout the Lac du Bois grasslands. At elevations around 500 metres, the sparrow's song is a familiar soundtrack to late spring. I can tell you exactly where to find Clay-coloured Sparrows in Lac du Bois.

Without realizing it, I had come to associate the species not only with a habitat, but with a particular elevation and landscape.

Recently, however, I've been spending more time at the newly established Juniper Ridge Conservation Area. This area sits on the other side of the valley. There, at approximately 840 metres elevation, I regularly hear Clay-coloured Sparrows singing

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Doug Smith with Gary Hunt

from shrubby patches and thickets. The bird seems perfectly at home.

At first glance, this feels surprising to me, and the BC Breeding Bird Atlas shows most breeding records below about 750 metres, so my mental picture wasn't entirely unreasonable. Yet the Juniper observations remind me how easily we can mistake our personal experience for a species' limits.

The explanation may lie in one of Kamloops' most fascinating ecological features: aspect.

Kamloops is a study in the effects of north- and south-facing slopes. The North Shore side of the valley, where Lac du Bois is located, receives more direct sun and is generally hotter and drier. The difference is significant enough that it influenced European settlement patterns. In the early twentieth century, homesteading was attempted in the Lac du Bois area. Around 1910, approximately 170 people were trying to make a living there, but by 1920 most had abandoned their claims.

The opposite side of the valley tells a different story. The slopes south of the river generally face north, making them cooler and moister. Families who settled there had greater success in their efforts to ranch and

live off the land, and thus much of the land on that side remains privately owned today. Even a casual observer can see the difference: the south side is greener and lusher than the grasslands across the valley.

For a bird like the Clay-coloured Sparrow, which favours shrubby habitats and thickets, these differences matter. An elevation of 840 metres on the cooler, north-facing slopes near Juniper may provide conditions similar to those found hundreds of metres lower on the hotter, south-facing slopes of Lac du Bois.

The lesson isn't really about sparrows. It's about expectations.

After years of hearing Clay-coloured Sparrows in one place, I had unconsciously built an image of where they "should" occur. But nature rarely conforms to our simplified mental maps. Species respond to temperature, moisture, vegetation structure, and countless other environmental factors— not to the categories we create.

The Clay-coloured Sparrow singing away above Juniper Ridge is a reminder that animals adapt to conditions rather than elevations on a map. Sometimes a familiar bird in an unexpected place teaches us more than all the times we find it exactly where we expected.

LAC DU BOIS BUTTERFLY WALK

Cori Dixon

Cori

On Thursday June 18th, ahead of the KNC AGM, a group of us walked my Lac du Bois northeast gate-to-cattle guard transect looking for butterflies. It was a lovely sunny evening with ambient temperature around 26 - 27°C and a bit of a breeze.

Before we set off, I shared that I started learning about butterflies just five years ago after joining the "Butterflies In My Backyard" project (The BIMBY Project - David Suzuki Foundation). Most project participants are casual observers, but a few of us have committed to walking the same 100-1000 metre route (i.e., transect) at least once per month to record all of the butterflies and each species of plant in bloom, along with some other key data, within 5 meters to either side, ahead and above. Because butterflies have such variable lifecycles and natural boom and bust cycles, butterfly surveys usually require a minimum 10 year span before any conclusions can be reached

about what factors might be impacting their populations. However, in the short term the transect data are being used by UBC Zoology & Botany scientist Michelle Tseng and her grad students to further research as it pertains to native vs non-native nectar sources.

A wide variety of caterpillar host plants makes the Lac du Bois transect a particularly

fun spot to seek butterflies. Of the 12 species I had observed on this transect the Sunday prior, our group saw the following:

Two-tailed Swallowtail, the largest of the six swallowtail species found in and around Kamloops. It is a common species but this year it emerged particularly early (my first observation this season was March 18th!) and in greater abundance than usual. Swallowtails are often territorial, so if you are lucky to have one in your neighbourhood you may see the same individual “patrolling” a large circular path through the area for up to two weeks.

Common ringlet, an adorable pale orange butterfly with a distinctive bobbing-up-and-down flight pattern.

Silvery Blue, generally the most abundant and widespread of the cute little Blues in and around Kamloops. It can be seen from mid-April through mid-July in most of our greenspaces and nature parks.

Melissa Blue (or possibly Northern Blue, or both). Melissa Blue is common at lower elevations, while Northern Blue is common at higher elevations, but both can be seen at Lac du Bois and they are so variable in appearance that they can be indistinguishable from one another at times.

I believe we saw Melissa but I could easily be wrong and we shall have to see what the experts have to say (if anything, because sometimes even they can't tell the two species apart where they overlap). We saw both males (which are usually more blue on the topsides) and females (which often are mostly brown on the topside with an orange band near the wing edges).



Tiger Swallowtail (above)



Silvery Blue
nectaring

Spreadwing skipper (likely Dreamy Duskywing), a small dark butterfly that can easily be mistaken for a beetle or fly (although, as the group saw, it's even easier, for me at least, to mistake a grasshopper or even a leaf for a butterfly!).

Possibly **Lupin or Cascadia Blue** fluttering about just past the trailhead. I was not able to get a good enough photo to tell for certain, but at this time the appearance, behaviour and location is consistent with one of those two species.

In addition, some of us saw:

Western Green Hairstreak mud puddling (a mineral-collecting behaviour). I initially thought it was a different species but once I was home and able to find an in-focus screen-grab I realized it was a species of which I've only observed two others for the first time ever this year.



Sulphur or Yellow-hued White. There are several possibilities and it flew by so fast there was no chance to get a photo.

Admiral (most likely Western White Admiral) spotted in the trees by a couple of eagle-eyed folks in the group. These tend to guard a small territory from the same perch so I'll be keeping an eye out for this one on my next transect walk up here. Someone asked about hybridization, and as it happens Western White Admirals interbreed so frequently with Lorquin's Admirals that the hybrid is a standard option that pops up on iNaturalist, and a number of the Admirals that I've seen on the Kamloops Rivers Trail have been hybrids.

As we ambled along I shared how the butterflies usually seen earliest in the spring (Mourning Cloaks and tortoiseshells) overwinter as adults in woodpiles, tree hollows and even under tarps or sheds. They can survive on tree sap, rotten fruit and scat until flowers start to bloom, and if the temperature dips back below 8°C or so they will go back into their "hibernation" of sorts and re-emerge when things warm up again. Generally the next species to emerge in spring are those that overwinter as chrysalises, followed by those that overwinter as caterpillars in leaf mulch or soil, and finally those that overwinter as eggs on their host plant. The latter, along with those that overwinter as adults, are also generally the last species seen in early-mid autumn. Of course there are oodles of exceptions to the rules! Some species with two-year lifecycles are only seen every second year, and some that normally have a one-year lifecycle can pause their development for another year if conditions aren't just right.

Someone asked if butterflies need water, and I've confirmed that the answer is yes. Even butterflies that derive most of their moisture needs from nectar will still glean water, such as it may be, from dampened earth.

In addition to our lucky butterfly sightings there were a variety of moths, dragonflies and grasshoppers en route. Some of us saw a snake (species uncertain), and there was a Western Painted Turtle basking on the tail near one of the nesting sights who skedaddled back to the lake as we approached. Those in the group with turtle knowledge pointed out evidence of turtle nest predation likely done by a raccoon. And since butterfly walking is done at a slow pace, and Tom Beeke (author of the recently published "Birds of Kamloops") was in our midst, the birders in the group were able to get a good look at all the perching birds and waterfowl as we went.

I very much enjoyed sharing a few little tidbits from my butterfly learning journey so far with such an enthusiastic group of fellow nature lovers. I'm by no means an expert, though, and am always open to hearing from those who know better and more than me!

GRASSLANDS CONFERENCE – BUS TRIP TO MCABEE FOSSIL BEDS AND HAT CREEK HISTORIC RANCH

By Diane McKelvey *Diane*

On the morning of June 4, a TRU field trip bus pulled up in Parking Lot N and about 25 people, including many from the Kamloops Naturalist Club, climbed aboard for an all-day field trip into the grasslands. This event was one of two field trips offered in conjunction with the Grasslands Conservation Council's Annual General Meeting. (The other field trip was a visit to the newly protected Juniper Ridge grasslands).

Our first stop was the McAbee Fossil Beds, which are located just off Highway 1, a few kilometres east of Cache Creek. Since 2012, it has been protected as a BC Heritage site, and is managed by the St'uxwtews Pesuten Heritage Society in collaboration with the Bonaparte First Nation.

The fossils are impressive. This is considered the most diverse Eocene fossil site in Canada. The fossils most commonly found include fish, insects, birds, spiders and crustaceans, as well as many plants. They were deposited 53 million years ago, at a time when the climate was much warmer than the present day. What makes this site special is not just the huge diversity of species, but also their abundance and excellent preservation.

After a warm welcome by the site keeper, we had the opportunity to walk a loop path through the fossil beds and were directed to areas where the fossils can often be found. We found many, which we left displayed on site for others to enjoy. We also had the opportunity to speak with a paleontologist and two graduate students who are doing research at the site.

McAbee Fossil Site



Our next stop was Hat Creek Ranch (pictured below), just north of Cache Creek on Highway 99.

After an excellent lunch, we were welcomed by Chief Frank Antoine. Like the McAbee Fossil Beds, the ranch is currently operated by the St'uxwtews Pesuten Heritage Society in collaboration with the Bonaparte First Nation.

We were able to tour the oldest building on the site— Hat Creek House, which was built in 1861 as a roadhouse on the Cariboo Wagon Road. The roadhouse is the last one of its type still standing, and is surprisingly well preserved. As the Cariboo Wagon Road was on the main route from the Lower Mainland to the goldfields near Barkerville, stage coaches regularly brought overnight visitors, particularly in the years between 1885 and 1905. We were able to tour the public rooms, kitchen, and guest rooms (still with the original wallpaper and flooring) and our tour guide told us entertaining stories about the days of the BC gold rush.

This was an unusual trip and a rewarding one, because it focused not so much on the present biology of the grasslands, but on their history and pre-history. It was good to see the way this has been preserved for present-day visitors to see and enjoy.



Hat Creek Ranch

BATTER UP!

By Diane McKelvey

Diane

In our most recent newsletter, I shared the responses that I received when I asked our Board members, “Why did you volunteer to be a Director of the KNC”? The answers reflected our Directors’ feelings of joy, meaning, and purpose in doing something that benefits nature and naturalists – not only now, but for future generations.

As a club, we are in a good situation right now – we have a full Board of competent and enthusiastic club members. Some have worked actively in the club for years, and others (like myself) are relative newcomers. But a club cannot stand still – sooner or later, all volunteers move on. Lives change: people move on because they are tired or too busy or too old or simply feel they have done their bit – and that is a necessary part of being a volunteer.

“Succession planning” is an issue that every business and organization must deal with – finding new people to take over the roles that the club needs. Although it seems scary to think that someone who is doing a great job is eventually going to leave, this is healthy and necessary for every organization. So yes, our club, like every other organization, is always looking for new people to take on responsibilities within the club. And it is the club’s job to encourage and mentor those who are willing to “step up”. (It’s somewhat ironic that the person named in our Bylaws to head up a nomination committee is the Vice President and our club currently doesn’t have one).

So what are the qualifications for volunteering for the club? They are pretty straightforward: being willing to work with and listen to other club members; being interested in learning how the club works; and having some time to spend – as little as an hour or two per week – doing something for the club that you feel is important. You don’t have to be an expert to contribute.

Yes, there are lots of reasons and excuses not to volunteer. Some people have served in the past and “done their bit” already. Most people’s lives are already busy and everyone has priorities that must be attended to. And many of us are unsure about whether we have the knowledge and ability to become a capable Director or President or other club leader. Fortunately we can be mentored by the people who have already served, so there is plenty of help for those who want to grow in this way.

Excuses aside, there are also lots of reasons to go ahead and volunteer anyway. Growth and change is not only possible, but necessary for the club – and you can be the person who brings this to KNC. You’ll have the opportunity to work with other volunteers, who are a fun and yes, inspiring, group. And you’ll know that you are doing something for Nature, and goodness knows Nature needs someone to stand up and speak on her behalf, now more than ever. Volunteering for the club is a great way to help Nature and the people who care for Nature; and incidentally, it’s also a great way to deal with the underlying anxiety that many of us currently feel about the future that Nature is facing.

So yes, the club does need you. And more importantly, Nature needs you. Would you like to be more involved in this organization? We currently need a vice-president and a field trip coordinator, and more positions may be coming up in January 2027. The door is open. Or (to mix metaphors) :

Batter up!