

CENTRAL ALBERTA MAY SPECIES COUNT



SATURDAY AND SUNDAY, MAY 28 and 29

Join in on this important Citizen Science program by counting birds, mammals, insects, amphibians and flowering plants. Potluck supper at Kerry Wood Nature Centre on Sunday, May 29th @ 6:00 PM



Call Judy Boyd at 403-358-1098 to participate

BJORGE FARM TOUR IN THE BATTLE RIVER HILLS

Saturday June 25 and Sunday 26: We will car pool to the Bjorge property on June 25, stopping en route at their old home-
stead to check for Turkey Vultures. This trip will involve a three-hour easy to medium hike through the Battle River Hills.
You have two ways to participate in this trip:

1. Go out on Saturday and camp overnight at the Ferry Point Campground. (Some tents will be available if you don't have your own. Bring your own food and sleeping gear. There is a minimal cost for the campsite.)
2. Meet at Meeting Creek (approximately a two hour drive from Red Deer) at 10:00 a.m. on June 25. On Saturday night there will be a Potluck Supper. Call Judy at 403-358-1098 if you plan to attend.

BULL CREEK HILLS FLOWER FOCUS FIELD TRIP

Located on the eastern edge of the Rocky Mountains, the Bull Creek Hills are an excellent place for early season hiking and flower identification. The compressed growing season means that one can see early spring flowers, such as prairie crocus (anemone) on a hillside next to the first few red paintbrushes along with many other summer flowers. We will be conducting a day hike to the "Boundary Pine" via Pack Trail Coulee and Grass Pass on June 3 and doing a shorter walk on June 4 into the environs of Fir Creek Valley. Don will lead another trip in the area on June 5.

The Bull Creek Hills are situated along the Highwood River Valley in Kananaskis Country and can be accessed from Highway 40, west of Longview, Alberta. There are accommodations in Longview as well as camping at the Green Ford Campsite west of Longview. If you are interested in participating for one or more days, please contact Phil French at (403)749-2899 or phlfrench@gmail.com via email.

http://phil-french.blogspot.ca/2015_05_01_archive.html



Photos by Phil French



THE MAY SPECIES COUNT

The May Species Count is a census of all living organisms. Individual animal numbers (example: Mule Deer - 6) are to be tallied during the course of the count.

Species names for blooming flowers are also documented. Plant lists can be added to the bird lists or submitted separately (contact Judy for a flower tally sheet). Contact Tony Blake (tonyblake@shaw.ca) if you have any questions about flower counting.

In the case of plant or animal rarities, photographs to confirm identification will be required. Odd or unusual situations (e.g., profuse numbers of a species one year; rare the next) should also be noted.

Please count between 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. on either Saturday May 28 or Sunday May 29. If you are counting both days, please use separate tally sheets and count in a different location on the second day. May Species count information will be submitted to Nature Alberta, so please be sure that all count information is complete (all blanks filled in).

It is important to know who is participating in the count so no overlap occurs. Please contact Judy Boyd at 403-358-1098 before May 24. Your bird tally sheet is included with this newsletter or can be printed off from <http://rdn.ca/programs/species-counts/2012-may-species-count/>

Please mail your tally sheet to the RDRN office: Box 785, Red Deer, Alberta, T4N 5H2 before June 15 or drop it off at the Nature Centre, attention: Judy.

SEASONAL SIGHTS AND SOUNDS OF ALBERTA: CAROTENOIDS COLOUR THE BALTIMORE ORIOLE

By Sally Stuart

The Baltimore Oriole usually arrives on our land in late May; the first evidence is either the brilliant flash of the orange colour of the male or his clear tones. His most common call is three distinctive notes, followed by a trill of six notes (the last of which is slurred downwards).

What causes his brilliant spring colour? Often colouration is seasonal, sexual and age related. Colour in birds is caused by a variety of factors, including pigments or structural characteristics of the feather.

Melanin is a pigment produced by body cells and is responsible for black and brown colouration. Carotenoids, on the other hand, cannot be produced internally so have to be ingested. These pigments travel as complex molecules to their site of use in the feathers, skin and bills. Plants (including seeds and fruits) are known to contain hundreds of carotenoids, which are responsible for the absorption of light for photosynthesis in plants, and help protect the chlorophyll from damage. When ingested by birds, they most commonly they cause yellow colouration but birds can also convert to give feathers a red and orange colouration. The brilliant orange of the male oriole is due to a mixture of carotenoids. Perhaps one of the most bizarre examples of carotenoid colouration is found in the Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*); it consumes carotenoids in feces found within the dead animal's digestive system. This gives them a yellow facial colouration, but why?

Structural properties of the feathers are also responsible for colouration. White is due to the feather scattering

light of all wavelengths equally and randomly while iridescence (such as is seen in hummingbirds) is also partly due to structural properties.

Knowing a little bit about how colour is produced in birds, let's examine how we are able to see different colours. Visible light is due to a range of wavelengths of different coloured light, so the colour we see means that that colour has been reflected, not absorbed. However, its perception also depends on the photoreceptor cells (cones) in the eye. Humans have three colour cones, but interestingly most birds tested to date appear to have four. This extra cone enables them to see in the ultra violet (UV) range. Interestingly, owls are a notable exception because they apparently do not detect UV. It would appear that orioles can and do see in the UV range, although we have no way of knowing exactly what they actually see.

Having looked at what causes feather colour, let's consider the function. Bird colouration serves a wide range of functions, perhaps the most obvious of which is it allows males to attract females or vice versa. However, it's odd when you consider that this attribute also makes a bird more visible and thus prone to predation. In humans, much scientific research examines the nutritional value of pigments in food; they act as antioxidants and immune modulators and may play an invaluable role in protection against diseases such as cancer and UV radiation. Presumably brightly coloured birds indicate health. Certainly we know that parasites and bacteria can effect feather colouration, causing a somewhat drab colouration.

So let's enjoy the colour of the orioles and other bird species. Consider the females who, when making mate choices, is carefully listening to the quality of the sound whilst eyeing up his coloration. As for those Egyptian Vultures what could be sexier than a beautiful yellow head due to the consumption of feces!

BIRD FOCUS

Keith Kline will be leading bird/nature walks on Saturday mornings. All walks start at 10:00 AM. Please call Keith 403-347-6883 for more details.

May 7—South of RDC. Meet in the south-west parking lot by the weather station.

May 14 —Heritage Ranch. Meet in the first parking lot.

May 28—Three Mile Bend. Meet in the first parking lot on the right.

June 4—Michael O'Brien Wetland...Go to the corner 55 St and 30 Ave at the lights. Park on the west side of 30th.

June 11—Gaetz Lakes Sanctuary. Meet in the Nature Centre.

June 18—Penhold. Phone Keith for information

June 25—Fort Normandeau. Meet in the first parking lot.



Photo by Myrna Pearman

FLOWER FOCUS

MAY 18 - 10:00 AM

KERRY WOOD NATURE CENTRE

FLOWERS OF THE MOJAVE AND COLORADO DESERTS



Photos by Don Wales

UPCOMING FLOWER FOCUS SCHEDULE

June 3–5 —Spring Flower field trip to the Bull Creek Hills. See page 2

June 20—Devonian Gardens field trip

The Red Deer River Naturalists, the first natural history organization to be established in Alberta, was incorporated as a society in 1906. The objectives of the society are to foster an increased knowledge, understanding and appreciation of natural history, and to support conservation measures dealing with our environment, wildlife and natural resources.

Annual membership is \$15.00 for individuals and \$20.00 for families.

Regular meetings are held at 7:30 p.m. on the fourth Thursday of most months at the Kerry Wood Nature Centre, 6300-45 Ave., Red Deer, AB. Non-members are welcome.

Members are encouraged to contribute to this newsletter. The deadline is the last Friday of the month.

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<http://wearenaturalwise.blogspot.com>

Our thanks to NOVA for underwriting the cost of newsletter printing



Page 1 photos by Myrna Pearman