

THE ALBERTA BIODIVERSITY MONITORING INSTITUTE: MONITORING THE STATUS & TRENDS OF BIODIVERSITY & HUMAN FOOTPRINT

Thur., Feb. 26 @ 7:00pm
Kerry Wood Nature Centre
Red Deer

The Alberta Biodiversity Monitoring Institute (ABMI) is a non-profit, independent, scientific organization. From the remote northern boreal forest to the middle of a southern canola field, we monitor and report on the status and trends of biodiversity and the human footprint. Using a randomized grid, the ABMI surveys 1,656 land and wetland sites in the province. Each site is re-visited every five to seven years. To monitor human footprint, the ABMI uses satellite imagery and aerial photography to provide both course and fine interpretations of human land use on the landscape. ABMI's data and reports are publicly available at www.abmi.ca.



All photos provided by Elyse Williams



Elyse Williams is a Land Access Coordinator with the ABMI. Working with private land owners, lease holders, government, industry and First Nations, Elyse ensures ABMI has permission to access survey sites across the province. As a member of the communications team, Elyse also coordinates the ABMI's public outreach and education initiatives.

- Free admission
- Open to the public

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RDRN PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2014 - DON WALES

It was a relatively quiet year for RDRN although exciting on the educational front which is one of RDRN's primary mandates. Some highlights of 2014:

- After a lot of hard work by Judy Boyd, Myrna Pearman and Doug Pederson the **Central Alberta Birding Trail** was published. The official launch ceremony is expected this spring. Work is underway on the associated Bird Trail website.
- The **RDRN website** was completely revised with input from Bill Heinsen, Judy Boyd, Bev French and several of the board members.
- RDRN continues to support the excellent work being done out at **the Ellis Bird Farm** with purchases of a projection system for their newly constructed pavilion.
- Unfortunately the popular Peregrine **Web Cam** in the nest box at the top of the TELUS communication tower was down all this year due to camera/ monitor incompatibilities. Judy is still trying to sort this out for 2015.
- RDRN offered to fund replacement plants for the **wildflower garden** in front of the Nature Center. As yet the money hasn't been spent but is still available for this spring. We appreciate all of the work done by the **Red Deer Garden Club** in maintaining this outdoor display.
- RDRN helped top up a cost over-run for a new **spotting scope** for the Gaetz Lake Sanctuary Bird Blind. Check it out next time you are in the sanctuary.
- RDRN provided some preliminary input into a proposed regional trail between Springbrook and Red Deer.
- RDRN has been providing input into the Kerry Wood Nature Interpretive display revision.
- RDRN is partnering with ReThink Red Deer and other organizations on **the Piper Creek Restoration Agriculture Project**. Details of this innovative project can be seen in the November 2014 issue of the RDRN newsletter available on the RDRN web site.
- In the spring I toured several members of City Council to a severely damaged site in **Bower Woods**. The site has been evolving for the last 10 years or more with BMX style jump excavations and features, destruction of the native ground cover, garbage accumulation, silting of the nearby Piper Creek, tree cutting and bush party debris. This was perhaps the worse site of over a dozen identified in the natural areas of our official parks but also in City owned natural areas. From this came a schedule of remediation starting with this Bower Woods site in the spring and continuing with the other sites in subsequent years. From this we are hoping that the City develops a strategy to deal with these areas as they appear before they become so large and expensive to repair. It is also an educational opportunity to alert the community to what are appropriate activities within the natural areas of our City.
- Thanks to Myrna, we have enjoyed a series of excellent guest speakers at our **General Meetings** throughout 2014.
- Myrna also continues to produce a fantastic newsletter each month, with proofing done by Dorothy Dickson and Judy Boyd.
- Judy has been experimenting with different times for the **Bird Focus** moving from Mondays to Sunday afternoons.
- Don continues with **Flower Focus** on the third Wednesday of most months starting at 10:00 at the Kerry Wood Nature Centre.
- RDRN has officially adopted **Maskepetoon Park** through the City's Adopt-a-Park program. If you are walking there please pick up litter and report any inappropriate activities on behalf of RDRN.
- Thank you to Maureen Dixon for stuffing the envelopes for the newsletter mail out.
- Thank you to Bev French for taking on the coffee and cookies for the general meetings.
- With the departure (possibly defection) of Bill Heinsen a major restructuring of the RDRN board took place with Bev taking over as treasurer, Keith handling memberships, and Lucienne looking after Alberta Liquor and Gaming Commission applications. We certainly appreciate Bill's major contributions over many years.
- RDRN members are stewards of the following natural areas:
- **Sylvan Lake**- Myrna Pearman; **Butcher Creek**- Bill Heinsen; **Innisfail Natural area**- Bev and Phil French
- RDRN has representation on several committees and organizations either by attending their meetings or keeping in touch with their activities. This includes: Tony Blake- Nature Alberta, Alberta Native Plant Council and Alberta Invasive Species Council; Eileen Ford- ANPC; Richard Townell- Gaetz Lake Sanctuary Committee; Bonnie Mullen Ellis Bird Farm; Michael Cholach- WEES; Don Wales WEES (just until Kerry Wood Nature Centre Plans are in place); Judy Boyd- Medicine River Wildlife Center
- Thank you to Will Davies and Larry Pimm who have stepped down this year from our Board. Their contributions have been appreciated.

	2014	2013
Trumpeter Swan	3	0
Great Blue Heron	0	1
Canada Goose	199	0
Mallard	302	1500
Lesser Scaup	2	0
Common Goldeneye	36	49
Bufflehead	1cw	0
Hooded Merganser	1	0
Bald Eagle	8	15
Cooper's Hawk	1	0
Northern Goshawk	1	0
Rough-legged Hawk	3	3
Merlin	4	1
Gyr Falcon	1	1
Gray Partridge	8	47
Ring-necked Pheasant	1	0
Ruffed Grouse	29	24
Rock Pigeon	354	448
Mourning Dove	1	0
Eurasian Collared-dove	16	4
Short-eared Owl	2	0
Great Horned Owl	4	5
Great Gray Owl	1	1
Snowy Owl	1	1
Northern Saw-whet Owl	0	1
Northern Pygmy Owl	0	1 cw
Downy Woodpecker	156	164
Hairy Woodpecker	64	64
Black-backed Woodpecker	1	0
American Three-toed Wpecker	1	0
Northern Flicker	29	24
Pileated Woodpecker	15	17
Gray Jay	10	10
Blue Jay	210	177
Black-billed Magpie	606	648
American Crow	10	2
Common Raven	413	530
Black-capped Chickadee	1115	1102
Boreal Chickadee	73	40
Red-breasted Nuthatch	26	32
White-breasted Nuthatch	128	80
Brown Creeper	4	2
Townsend's Solitaire	1	1cw
Golden-crowned Kinglet	0	1
American Robin	1cw	0
Bohemian Waxwing	1082	2336
Northern Shrike	5	3
European Starling	12	21
White-throated Sparrow	2	0
Dark-eyed Junco	31	73
White-crowned Sparrow	0	1cw

Central Alberta's annual **Christmas Bird Count** was held on December 21, 2014. **Count Compiler: Judy Boyd.** A total of 91 observers (101 in 2013) recorded a total of 53 species (43 in 2013) and 6,686 individual birds (8,699 in 2013.) The highest number of species recorded since 1986 was in 2004 (61 species) and the highest number of individual birds recorded was in 2005 (14,540). Two count week (cw) birds were seen: one Bufflehead and one American Robin. A record number of Trumpeter Swans (3) and Eurasian Collared-Doves (16) were recorded. A Hooded Merganser was recorded for the first time and a Townsend's Solitaire for the third time (2 in 1994 and 1 in 2007). They have been recorded twice as count week birds: 1 bird in both 2012 and 2013.

Feeder watching: 129.75 hours; Walked: 33.25 hr, 55.71 km; Driven: 55 hr 25 min, 1594 km. The temperature ranged from +4 to -11°C. The snow cover ranged from a depth of 5-30 cm. The wind went from 0-40 km/h and came from various directions. Phillip Anderson, Colleen Anderson, Dee Bagshaw, Brian Biggs, Ron Bjorge, Judy Boyd, Larry Boyd, Colten Brule, Lois Burkinshaw, Phil Burkinshaw, Vivian Busat, Jerry Caddy, John Caddy, Sandra Cameron, Ron Dermott, Marg Dewald, Kris Dugas, Sharon Faszer, Bertha Ford, Harry Ford, Eileen Ford, Stewart Ford, Alina Freedman, Phil French, Darcy Gabert, Marilyn Gorrigan, Gordon Graham, Sharon Graham, Annette Gray, Bernice Grey, Robert Grey, Connie Haustein, Bill Heinsen, Liz Heinsen, Sharon Henry, Scott Hoyland, Marlene Ironside, Roy Jamieson, Gordon Johnson, Pat Johnson, Carol Kelly, Keith Kline, Linda Kullman, Andrea Lash, Carol Lavold, Joyce Lemke, Jim Leslie, Claudia Lipski, Carol Lynass, Shelly Macauley, Kent MacFarland, Linda Marshall, Janet Martin, Irene MacIntosh, Vi McDonald, Tim McJunkin, Michael & Rhonda McNaughton, Jackie Miller, Ken Miller, Perry Miller, Jeff Moker, Lauren Morgan-Outhisack, Susan Morris, Stephen Morris, Bonnie Mullin, Clint Nissen, Jan O'Donoghue, Marie Payne, Chantal Payne, Chester Payne, Thomasina Payne, Myrna Pearman, Doug Pedersen, Darren Petersen, Barb Rooney, Lawrence Rooney, Gerald & Sylvia Schmidt, Eric Sinton, Helga Sinton, Jack & Jacouie Swainson, Rick Tallas, Bob Towns, Frank Weber, Graydon & Memphis Willsie, Dianne Wilton, Kevin & Doreen Wingert.

Snow Bunting	130	301
Common Grackle	1	0
Pine Grosbeak	160	4
House Finch	107	117
Purple Finch	0	4
Common Redpoll	554	2
Hoary Redpoll	19	0
Pine Siskin	5	7
Evening Grosbeak	27	12
American Goldfinch	0	22
House Sparrow	711	803

NATIONAL PARKS REPORT

by Dorothy Dickson

JASPER: re. The Maligne Tours Ltd. 14 proposals for major developments at Maligne Lake. In July, Parks Canada announced that, after receiving extensive opposition, including an excellent letter from three former senior Parks administrators, it was denying permission for the luxury hotel but accepting the other 13 elements of the proposal "subject to more detailed design-level proposals". The worst of these is the idea for 15 permanent tent cabins along the shore. Currently, release of Park land for commercial overnight accommodation outside the Jasper townsite is prohibited by the Park's Management Plan. Parks Canada said it would consider changing the Plan. As this would set a dangerous precedent for all other National Parks' Plans, Ecojustice is taking Parks Canada to court on behalf of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society and the Jasper Environmental Association.

BANFF: I have not heard of any further discussion of the proposal to re-introduce bison to the Park. The dam on 40-mile Creek was finally removed to allow free movement for fish.

WOOD BUFFALO: There is concern about the recent approval, by B.C. and Federal Government Ministers, of the enormous Site C hydro-electric dam on the Peace River near the Alberta border. Both Ministers justified their decision by saying that the benefits of job creation and power for resource extraction and export were in the public interest, while acknowledging there would be adverse environmental, social, agricultural and heritage affects - the reasons why the dam was rejected twice in the last 20 years. If the dam goes ahead, Parks Canada is asking for an assessment of the cumulative impacts on the Peace-Athabasca Delta, 80% of which is included in the National Park, if another dam is added to the two already built on the Peace River. Construction was to have started this month but I gather there are now court cases proposed if not already pending.

There is good news from Wood Buffalo that the Park's Whooping Crane population continues to increase with 82 nests last spring. The total crane population is now approximately 400 birds - up from only 21 in 1941. The species is still considered 'vulnerable'.

GROSS MORNE: This National Park is a World Heritage site. Last year I reported increasing opposition to proposals for off-shore oil exploration and fracking close to the Park Boundary. The Newfoundland Gov-

ernment announced a moratorium on fracking on its land and the Off-shore Petroleum Regulating Board refused to extend exploration licences. Since then the UNESCO World Heritage Committee has stepped in, asking Canada to create a permanent protected buffer zone round the Park and Heritage site. There was a good public response in support of a petition for this so, hopefully, the threat to the Park will not happen.

ROUGE NATIONAL URBAN PARK: Situated near to Toronto, this is the first National Park proposed for an urban area. It is an ecologically rich area which contains intact watersheds and over a thousand species of plants and animals, including 23 species at risk. The Federal Government tabled legislation and produced a draft management plan. This was rejected by the Ontario Government which said it would not transfer the land to the Federal Government unless the plan made conservation the management priority and allowed for wildlife corridors to adjoining Federal lands.

SOUTH OKANOGAN: Parks Canada's feasibility study does not seem to have progressed due to continuing opposition by other interests in the area.

MARINE CONSERVATION AREAS: The Federal Government has been very slow to legislate these. A particular disappointment was the removal of the area in the St. Lawrence near Cacouna in Quebec which was proposed to protect the diminishing population of beluga whales and their calving grounds. It seems this reversal is to allow expansion of the nearby port for export of oil sands bitumen. CPAWS did get a short court injunction to stop work during the 2014 calving season.

NOTES: 1) Canada is a signatory to the 2010 International Convention on Biological Diversity which commits it to protect a minimum of 17% of its land and 10% of its oceans by 2020. Currently Canada has only protected 10% of its land and 1% of its oceans.

2) An interesting and somewhat surprising appointment by the Federal Government was that of Julie Gelfand, the former Executive Director of Nature Canada, as Environment Commissioner. She filed a report in October.



We were pleased that long-time RDRN member, Dorothy Hazlett, was able to attend our January meeting. She introduced our guest speaker, her God child and namesake, Dr. Dorothy Hill.



THANK YOU BILL! THANK YOU BEV!

A big thank you to Bill Heinsen for all his years as Treasurer of Red Deer River Naturalists. Bill officially passed the reins over to Bev French at the January 22 AGM. Thank you, Bev, for taking on this job!



PROVINCIAL PARKS REPORT 2014

By Dorothy Dickson

SOUTH SASKATCHEWAN REGIONAL PLAN: The final version of this 50 year plan was released in July. There were some improvements over earlier drafts. Three new Wildland Parks were created, including the long promised one in the Castle area but it only encompasses about half the area for which we had hoped. Wildland Parks do allow for some commercial and motorized recreational uses so, while the high headwaters above treeline are well protected, the ecologically important foothills valleys, some of which are critical for species at risk, are not.

There is always much talk about 'balance' in all but the most strictly protected areas, such as Ecological Reserves, but it always seems that the combination of commercial, industrial and recreational uses are given more weight than conservation and this Plan gives no guidelines on how these and competing non-destructive uses such as hiking and skiing will be managed but promises more detailed planning will be ready by late 2015. The Plan also designates new "Conservation Areas" but, through all the hearings we were unable to get a clear definition of that term. In fact much of the language in the Plan is vague and ambiguous. The important concept of "cumulative effects" was barely mentioned, as was connectivity between protected areas which is so vital for wildlife movement.

There was little definite information about protection of rivers, riparian areas and the grasslands, where there were no designated "Conservation Areas" and no areas where native grasslands will be protected from oil and gas exploration or conversion to other forms of agriculture. There is a one new Heritage Rangeland, Pekisko, in the Plan.

NORTH SASKATCHEWAN REGIONAL PLAN: Hearings have started for this Region which covers the Eastern Slopes west of us, including the Bighorn which was once designated as a Park. Like the other Regional Plans, the main theme seems to be that we will continue doing what we are doing now for the next 50 years but more advanced technol-

ogy will ensure we do it "better". Better for what is not specified. More next year!

WILMORE WILDERNESS PARK: An area about 10 km. long just outside the Park boundary has been opened to logging. This is a threat to the Park caribou which often cross from the Park into the forested area.

ANTELOPE HILLS PROVINCIAL PARK: 380 hectares of native grassland have been privately donated to the Province on condition it is used only for wildlife habitat and non-mechanized and non-consumptive day uses.

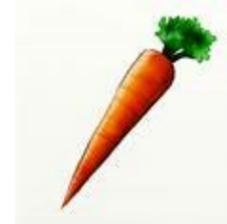
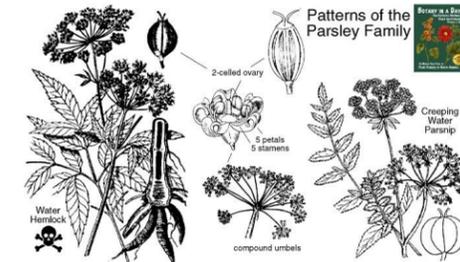
WALDRON CONSERVATION PROJECT: The Nature Conservancy of Canada and the Waldron Grazing Co-op were the proponents of this wonderful project which will protect a large area between the Wildland Park in the Whaleback and the Porcupine Hills Forest Reserve, thus forming a protected area of over 30,000 acres (12,000 hectares). The Grazing Co-op was the largest contributor to the \$37.5 million cost. Contributions from the Federal and Provincial Governments totalled \$16 million and a public appeal raised the last \$3million.

BEAVER HILLS INITIATIVE: This area, which includes Elk Island National Park, Miquelon Lakes Provincial Park and other smaller Provincial protected areas was nominated by petition as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. (I just heard on Jan 18th. it has been accepted but have no official confirmation of that).

PARKS DEPARTMENT: In September it was announced that the Provincial Parks Department was being moved into the Environment & Sustainable Resources Development Department. The recently created Recreation Trails Partnership project was also moved. We have frequently advocated for Parks staff to be given a larger role in the Regional Planning process so perhaps this will be a helpful move. The new Minister, who has 'Stewardship' added to his title, is Kyle Fawcett, a Calgary MLA. He has degrees in Political Science and Economics and was an industry consultant and a member of the Calgary Board of Education before becoming an MLA.

BIRD FOCUS

NOTE: There will be no Bird Focus outings in February.



FLOWER FOCUS

February 18th

10:00 AM KWNC

Apiaceae

GYRFALCON: Judy Boyd photographed this gyrfalcon west of Penhold, about a week before the Christmas Bird Count. It may have been the same one recorded on Count Day.

RDRN SCHOLARSHIP: David Larsen is a third year biology student who is currently enrolled in the University of Alberta's Ecology Honours program. He has been awarded the Red Deer River Naturalists Scholarship for his contribution in wildlife protection. David started his degree at Red Deer College, where he has just finished his first two years of post-secondary education. He decided to begin his degree at Red Deer College because it was close to home, and the idea of small class sizes made him think that it would be an easier transition from high school.

He hopes to be admitted one day into graduate school at the University of Alberta so that he can get his PhD in the field of Ecology. David has thanked RDRN for awarding him this scholarship, saying the money will go a long way in helping him with his education goals.

Throughout his last two semesters, David was honoured with being placed on the President's Honour Roll for his hard work in receiving a GPA over 3.5.



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 7:00 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. Deadline is the last Friday of the month.

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