



The Red Deer River Naturalist

EDITORS: MYRNA PEARMAN, JUDY BOYD AND SALLY STUART

JANUARY 2018

RDRN ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Come to hear about the activities and accomplishments of the past year!



Reports, achievements, events, speakers and much more

Thursday, January 25th • 7:30 M

Kerry Wood Nature Centre

*Everyone welcome
Refreshments served*



NORTHERN FLYING SQUIRRELS

By Myrna Pearman (January Red Deer Advocate column)

Northern flying squirrels are among our most interesting wild neighbours. Although they are quite common in Central Alberta, their nocturnal lifestyle means that they are seldom encountered by humans. Some bird feeding enthusiasts report seeing them dining at their bird feeders after dark (they love sunflower seeds) and there are reports of them taking up residence in bluebird or duck nestboxes. One fellow bluebird trail operator reported getting a very vicious bite when he put his hand into one of his bluebird boxes to check the box contents. The box contained a flying squirrel family, with Mom just trying to protect her family. A fellow naturalist has also documented the fascinating world of flying squirrels with the use of a thermal imager. The squirrels, which show up as red dots on the imager screen, can be seen leaping great distances between tree branches.

Most people know that flying squirrels can't actually fly. Rather, their patagia (a unique membrane stretched between their front and back legs) enables them to glide with ease. Apparently, they have been recorded gliding up to 100 m. They bob their head up and down and from side to side be-

fore launching themselves and, once airborne, steer with their forelegs and use their flattened tail as a rudder.

The flying squirrels' large ears and huge, black and glossy eyes enable them to navigate easily in their night world. They are omnivorous, dining on nuts, seeds, berries, insects and tree buds as well eggs and nestlings. Gregarious by nature, they will often roost with other individuals in a roosting cavity. Several years ago, I found the tail of a flying squirrel in my yard, the only piece left of an individual that had likely been killed by a neighbourhood cat. I remember stroking the tail, admiring the incredibly soft and delicate fur, but puzzling at how flat it felt. I later learned that their tails are flattened to assist with buoyancy and increase aerial maneuverability.

More recently, I've had the opportunity to encounter flying squirrels in natural cavities and nestboxes. It is incredible to be able to gaze into those massive black eyes!

Don Auten of Ponoka has been able to obtain some incredible images of flying squirrels. These rare captures show the squirrels in various poses, including one with its patagia outstretched. Our thanks to Don for sharing these images!



BYLAWS: The RDRN Board has been working hard to update the bylaws. At the Annual General Meeting on January 25, 2018, RDRN members can vote to rescind the old bylaws and accept the revised ones. Remember, you have to be a paid-up member in order to vote. To see the bylaws go to our website: www.rdrn.ca. Click on the **Links** button on the home page (beside the owl logos) to find both the old and the revised bylaws. Get involved! Check out our bylaws.



FLOWER FOCUS

January 17 • 10:00 AM • KWNC

WILDFLOWERS OF ANZA BORREGO IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

CAROLINE HARRIS

UPCOMING SPEAKERS

Sally Stuart has taken over the speaker's committee from Myrna Pearman. Thanks Sally!

February 22—Elly Knight: **Birds of the Unknown—Ecology and Conservation of Nightjars in Canada**

March 29— Dr. Phil Currie: **Current Research on Alberta Dinosaurs at the U of A.** This talk is booked as a joint talk with RDC so will be held at the Margaret Parsons Lecture Theatre.

BIRD SIGHTINGS FROM PAST BIRD FOCUS TRIPS

Keith Kline provided us with the following bird sightings from the late fall trips. Our thanks to Keith for leading these trips and for the birders who join him! He will resume these outings again in April.

South of Red Deer College—August 26: Canada Goose, American Avocet, American Crow, Greater Yellowlegs, Common Goldeneye, Blue Jay, Cedar Waxwing, Black-capped Chickadee, Red-breasted Nuthatch, American Robin, Yellow Warbler

Hazlet Lake—September 9: Black-capped Chickadee, Downy Woodpecker, Cedar Waxwing, Ring-billed gull, Canada Goose, Double-crested Cormorant, American Goldfinch, Common Raven, Blue-winged Teal, Common Goldeneye, Gray Catbird, Redhead, American Coot, Blue Jay, Mallard

Nova Nature Trails—September 30: Canada Goose, Black-billed Magpie, Mallard, Common Raven, Greater Yellowlegs, Great Blue Heron, Swainson's Hawk

Maskatooton—October 7: Dark-eyed Junco, Common Raven, Black-capped Chickadee, Blue Jay, Mallard, American Robin, Black-billed Magpie, Downy Woodpecker, Rough-legged Hawk, Boreal Chickadee

River Bend—October 14: Northern Flicker, Mallard, Black-capped Chickadee, Lesser Yellowlegs, Common Raven, Blue Jay, Red-breasted Nuthatch, White-breasted Nuthatch, Black-billed Magpie



Photos by Don Wales

Heritage Ranch—October 27: Boreal Chickadee, Black-capped Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, Common Raven, Black-billed Magpie, Northern Flicker, Blue Jay

Mackenzie Trails—November 4: Common Raven, Blue-winged Teal, Canada Goose, Black-billed Magpie, European Starling, White-breasted Nuthatch, Black-capped Chickadee, Boreal Chickadee, Downy Woodpecker, Tundra Swan, Cooper's Hawk

Kin Canyon—November 25: Black-billed Magpie, Black-capped Chickadee, Blue Jay, Northern Flicker, White-breasted Nuthatch, Red-breasted Nuthatch

Gaetz Lakes Sanctuary—December 2: Downy Woodpecker, Black-capped Chickadee, Black-billed Magpie, Common Raven, White-breasted Nuthatch, House Finch, Blue Jay



INTERESTING SIGHTINGS



Kathryn Kopciuk sent us this image of a Common Raven mobbing a Snowy Owl near Calgary. Bird-watchers and photographers are observing ravens becoming increasingly aggressive towards snowies.



RIGHT: A male Mountain Bluebird was seen near Clive on December 17th. As fate would have it, this sighting was on the Central Alberta Christmas Bird Count day, so it will go into the official record as a CBC species.

LEFT: Cathy Cocks, who lives just over the Saskatchewan border near Empress, AB photographed this male Red-bellied Woodpecker visiting her feeder. This sighting is the seventh record for Saskatchewan and (if it happens to flit across the border) would be the fifth record for Alberta.

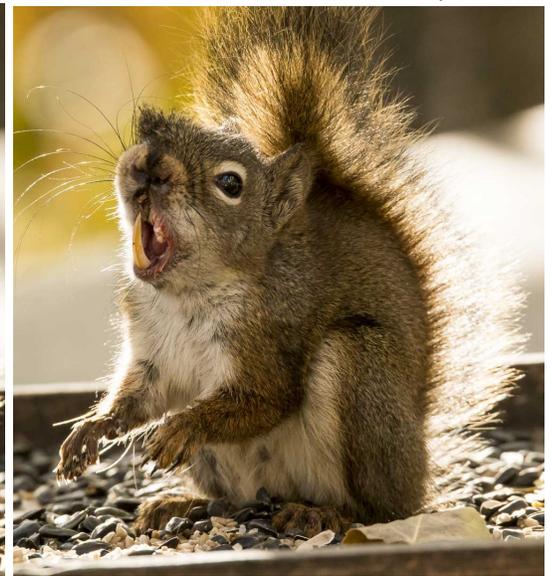
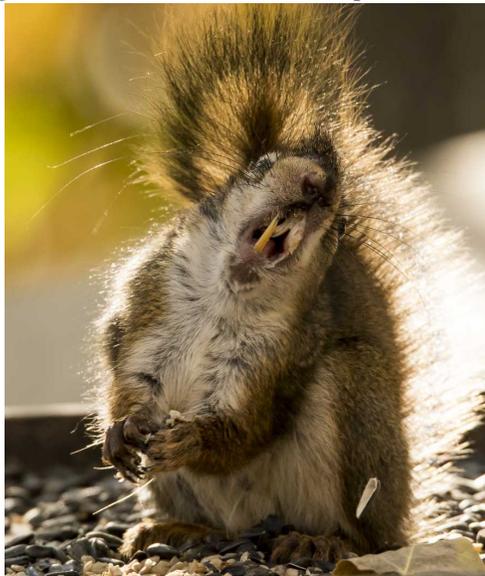


SQUIRREL WITH CLEFT PALATE

Story and Photos by Leo de Groot

An unusual sighting on our Sylvan Lake deck this year was a young squirrel with a cleft palate condition. As a result, and similar to some humans with this affliction, its teeth did not grow properly. Only the bottom right incisor grew well. Consequently, since this tooth did not grind against the matched upper incisor as would be the case normally, this single incisor continued to grow to the point where the squirrel could not close its mouth properly and swallow normally. The animal continued to feed on broken sunflower seeds from our feeder, but had to resort to swinging its head back at times in order to be able to ingest what it could pick up. This motion was accompanied by almost convulsive moves of his head before he finally could work the seed through his throat. We observed a squirrel with a similar condition at our feeders three years ago, so the gene seems to be active in this local population.

In the images here, one can see his cleft upper lip and the abnormal extent of his single incisor. As well, a video of the suffering of the poor thing can be viewed at this link: <https://youtu.be/9G3zqBPeURM>. The squirrel was never seen again shortly after this video was taken. It cannot have survived for much longer with this single incisor continuing relentlessly to grow.



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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Photos, unless noted otherwise, by Myrna Pearman