



# The Red Deer River Naturalist

EDITORS: MYRNA PEARMAN, SUSAN VAN DER HOEK AND JUDY BOYD

JANUARY 2019

# 24

January  
2019  
7:30 p.m.  
Kerry Wood  
Nature Centre  
Red Deer

## RED DEER RIVER NATURALISTS ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING



REPORTS, ACHIEVEMENTS,  
EVENTS, SPEAKERS AND  
MUCH MORE!

Everyone Welcome  
Refreshments Served

SPONSORED BY



# GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT: FEBRUARY 15–18, 2019

The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) is a joint partnership between Audubon and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, with Bird Studies Canada as the official Canadian partner. The GBBC is an annual four-day event that engages birdwatchers of all ages across North America in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of where the birds are. It's free, fun, and easy - and it helps the birds! It's as simple as counting the birds at a location near you, estimating how many birds you saw of each species, and filling out an online checklist on the Great Backyard Bird Count website. Email [gbbc@birdscanada.org](mailto:gbbc@birdscanada.org) for more information. BSC is seeking Great Backyard Bird Count Ambassadors. If you are interested in promoting the GBBC in your area, please contact the Canadian Great Backyard Bird Count Coordinator, Kerrie Wilcox, at [gbbc@birdscanada.org](mailto:gbbc@birdscanada.org) or 1-888-448-2473 ext. 134.

[www.birdcount.org](http://www.birdcount.org)

*Shirley Otway of Calgary sent us this picture showing a Cackling Goose in the foreground. According to Cornell Lab of Ornithology, the newly recognized Cackling Goose is a smaller version of the Canada Goose. Formerly considered the smallest subspecies of one variable species, recent work on genetic differences found the four smallest forms to be very different. These four races are now recognized as a full species: the Cackling Goose. It breeds farther northward and westward than does the Canada Goose.*



Photo by Myrna Pearman



**SUPPORT THE BIGHORN!** If you look at a map of Banff and Jasper National Parks, it's easy to spot the Bighorn region. It's the missing puzzle piece between these two large protected areas. The Bighorn is 6,717 square-kilometres of mountains, foothills, grasslands, rivers and lakes along the Eastern Slopes of the province — just a little bigger than Banff National Park. This area lies west of Rocky Mountain House, and three hours southwest of Edmonton. It forms the headwaters of the North Saskatchewan River, which ultimately runs through Edmonton and into Saskatchewan, providing drinking water to hundreds of communities along the way. On Nov. 23, 2018, the Government of Alberta announced a proposal to create a series of protected areas and parks known as Bighorn Country.

The Bighorn Country proposal advances long-standing conservation priorities in Alberta's Eastern Slopes, including enhanced protection for headwaters, preservation of wildlife habitat and advancing towards Canada 1 targets of 17% protected lands by 2020. Additionally, the plan allows for better management of human impacts on the landscape while still fostering recreation and tourism opportunities. This is a massive step in the right direction — there will be a place for *all* Albertans with this Bighorn Country system — as well as a place for wildlife.

**NOTE: All further public meetings have been cancelled due to Minister Shannon Phillip's concern about public safety. Her press release reads, in part:**

*However, in recent weeks I have become increasingly concerned about the inflamed rhetoric and inaccurate statements made by some organizations and individuals on social media. This has led to significant misinformation on the status and substance of the proposal for Bighorn Country and, more recently, allegations of bullying, abuse, and concerns over personal safety. I have heard stories of Albertans afraid to attend community events, Albertans berated in public, Albertans followed home, and Albertans feeling intimidated to not speak their mind or participate in this important discussion. These reports are not only deeply concerning, this behaviour is not reflective of the values we all share. I call on all of my elected colleagues to denounce the bullying and harassment being faced by Bighorn supporters. As we do not feel we can guarantee the public's safety or freedom from intimidation at this time, I am very disappointed to announce that the upcoming sessions for Drayton Valley, Red Deer, Sundre and Edmonton will be cancelled. The Government of Alberta will immediately re-evaluate our engagement plans in order to ensure Albertans in the communities of Drayton Valley, Red Deer, Sundre and Edmonton can participate safely.*

<https://www.loveyourheadwaters.ca/the-bighorn>

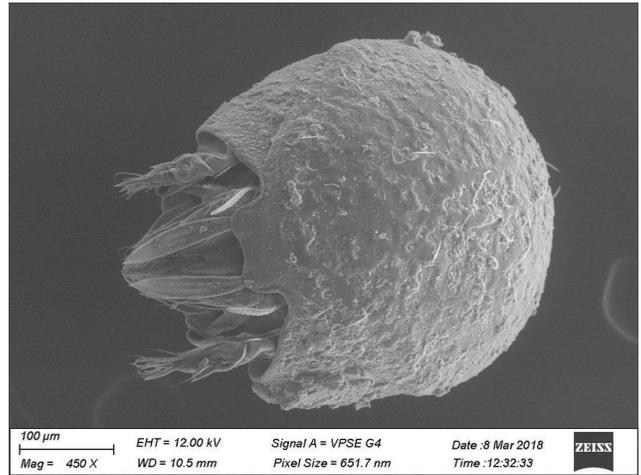
Main email for RSVP, public feedback, written input, comments:  
[aep.bighorncountry@gov.ab.ca](mailto:aep.bighorncountry@gov.ab.ca). You can also contact Rick Blackwood, Assistant Deputy Minister - Strategy Division at: [rick.blackwood@gov.ab.ca](mailto:rick.blackwood@gov.ab.ca) or by phone at: 780 427 1139

# NEW MITE DISCOVERED

By Susan van Hoerk

Dr. Lisa M. Lumley, a taxonomist in the Department of Natural History, Royal Alberta Museum, has discovered an oribatid mite in the ABMI 2017 collection that appears to be new to science. It is the 4th species in the genus *Eupelops* to be documented in Alberta. Twenty-five specimens were collected at Site 1579 in mixed-grass prairie near Cypress Hills.

Also here is a little bit of info about the soil mite which I gleaned from the Alberta Royal Museum, Collections, Invertebrate Zoology, Part 1 Almanac of Alberta Oribatida co-written by Dr. Lumley.



Oribatid Mites: Acari, Acariformes, Sarcoptiformes, Oribatida In the strict sense (excluding Astigmata), oribatid mites (also known as Cryptostigmata, Oribatei, moss mites, armoured mites, or beetle mites) comprise about 11,000 described species distributed across about 1,300 genera and approximately 175 families depending on synonymies (more than one name for given taxon) and the interpretations of various taxonomists (e.g. Subías 2004, Norton & Behan-Pelletier 2009). In this work we are following the taxonomy in the Catalogue of the Oribatida (Acari) of Continental United States and Canada (Marshall et al. 1987) and the Diversity of Oribatida in Canada website (Eamer & Behan-Pelletier 2004) as modified in the 3rd Edition of the Manual of Acarology (Krantz & Walter 2009) except the Cohort Astigmata (=Astigmatina, Acaridida), a group of highly derived oribatid mites that has traditionally been given its own suborder, is not included.

Most described species of oribatid mites inhabit the organic layers of soils (including suspended soils in forest canopies) where they feed on microbes, detritus, and smaller, softbodied invertebrates such as nematodes. Their comminution of litter, regulation of fungal growth by grazing, and dispersal of microbial propagules are considered important contributions to the functioning of the decomposer subsystem in terrestrial ecosystems. Oribatids usually dominate the abundance and diversity of the soil mesofauna in forest habitats and are prominent in grasslands, deserts, freshwater habitats, and peatlands (Behan-Pelletier & Bisset 2004; Walter & Proctor 1999; Norton & Behan-Pelletier 2009). Oribatids have proven useful as bioindicators, especially of heavy metal pollution (see Eeva & Penttinen 2009 for a recent review).



**Wisdom** is a wild female Laysan Albatross. She is the oldest confirmed wild bird in the world as well as the oldest banded bird in the world. Wisdom hatched in or around 1951. In 1956, at the estimated age of five, she was tagged by scientists at the Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge for study, but then returned to the wild rather than being kept in captivity. The person to attach the first tag was Chandler Robbins, a senior scientist at the USGS.

On December 3, 2014, Wisdom made headlines when she laid an egg at the Midway Atoll. Her mate had arrived at the atoll on November 19 and Wisdom was first spotted by the refuge staff November 22. The egg was estimated to be number 36 for Wisdom over her lifetime. Albatrosses lay one egg per year and mate for life. Out of the last nine years, Wisdom has laid an egg for eight of them. Scientists have speculated that since Wisdom is so unusually old for her species, she may have had to find another mate to keep breeding.

The USGS has tracked Wisdom since she was tagged, and they have logged that Wisdom has flown over three million miles since 1956. To accommodate her increasing longevity, the USGS has replaced her tag a total of six times. She also - and her chick - survived the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami that killed a huge number of Laysan and Black-footed albatrosses at the refuge.

In December, 2016, Wisdom (at the approximate age of 66) hatched and reared another chick. In December 2017, she was breeding again. Most albatrosses lay every other year, but Wisdom has successfully hatched a chick every year since 2006. In December 2018, USFWS Pacific Region reported that Wisdom was back on Midway Atoll and had laid an egg.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wisdom\\_\(albatross\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wisdom_(albatross))

# BIRD FOCUS

By Keith Kline

This year, RDRN plans to host a challenge to document as many bird species as possible within the area outlined in the Central Alberta Birding Trail map. The challenge is open to everyone—including non members. The plan is to ask volunteers to email all bird sightings to RDRN at [rdrn.nature@gmail.com](mailto:rdrn.nature@gmail.com). RDRN would then check sightings reports and post them to a running tally on a designated web page (which will be set up soon).

The Central Alberta Birding Trail map can be downloaded from the RDRN website. The RDRN website also has the Central Alberta bird checklist for downloading.

# INSECT FOCUS

Wednesdays • KWNC

10:00 AM — 12:00 PM

January 16:

*Lepidoptera : butterflies, moths and skippers*



Photo by Don Wales

February 20: *Diptera*

March 20: *Hymenoptera*

April 17: Field trip and review

May 15: Field trip



Photos by Susan Van der Hoek



## RDRN Bird Focus Group Walk • December 1 • Gaetz Lake Bird Sanctuary • 7 Observers

*Thank you Keith for leading these tours!*

The birding group was out for about 45 minutes and then celebrated with coffee and cake. Keith was presented with some gifts as a thank you for his efforts. *Sightings:* Black-capped Chickadee, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, White-breasted Nuthatch, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Black-billed Magpie, White-winged Crossbill, Pileated Woodpecker.

[wearenaturalwise.blogspot.com](http://wearenaturalwise.blogspot.com)

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.

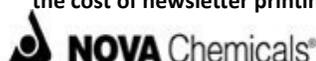
Regular meetings are held at 7:30 p.m. on the fourth Thursday of most months at the Kerry Wood Nature Centre, 6300-45 Ave., Red Deer, AB. Non-members are welcome.

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

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