

## Red Deer River Naturalists

# Annual Banquet

▶ **Friday October 25, 2019**  
Doors open 6:00pm, Dinner 6:30pm  
Pioneer Lodge, 4324 46A Ave., Red Deer  
Tickets: \$35. Must be purchased in  
advance at Kerry Wood Nature Centre  
before Monday October 21, 2019.

Paul Nicklen via  
National Geographic



## NARWHAL IN A TIME OF CHANGE

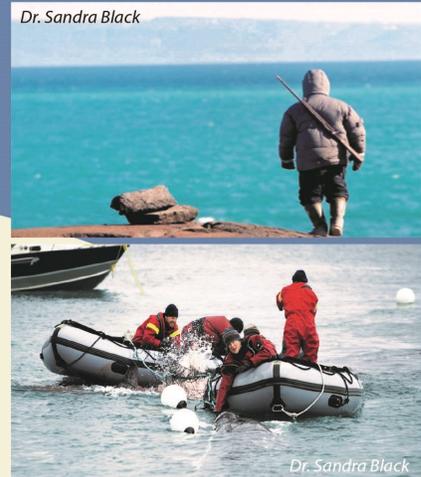
### DR. SANDRA BLACK

Dr. Black will talk about a health monitoring program for Narwhal, Dolphin and Union Caribou in the Arctic.



Dr. Sandra Black with Colleague  
Dr. Doug Whiteside

Dr. Sandra Black



Dr. Sandra Black

Dr Black is the head of Veterinary Services at the Calgary Zoo. She is also a Clinical Associate Professor and PhD student in Biology at the University of Calgary. She has been at the Calgary Zoo for 30 years, where she has overseen conservation medicine on a variety of species, including Whooping Cranes and Greater Sage Grouse, Burrowing Owls, Prezwalski's horses, and Northern Leopard frogs.

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Red Deer River Naturalists



# THE ELUSIVE EVENING GROSBEAK

By Myrna Pearman (reprinted from *The Gardener*)

One of the Prairie Provinces' most colorful and interesting winter bird species is the Evening Grosbeak. Sadly, this iconic finch has disappeared from much of its former range.

Between the 1950s and the mid-1980s, Charlie Ellis of Lacombe, AB, fed sunflower seeds to the large flocks of Evening Grosbeaks that descended on his farm each winter. So abundant were these birds and so great was their appetite that Charlie would buy sunflower seeds by the grain truck load and dispense them in cattle troughs. He went through about two tons of seeds during an average winter and one year fed a total of 11 tons of seeds! The birds would also drink at the heated bird baths that Winnie kept filled during the winter.

These birds were still abundant when Charlie and Winnie helped establish Ellis Bird Farm (EBF) in 1982. When I assumed the Biologist's position at EBF in 1987 and wrote my first book in 1989 (*Winter Bird Feeding: An Alberta Guide*), I was inspired by the flocks of grosbeaks that came every day to the feeders beside my office window.

Evening Grosbeaks have not been recorded at Ellis Bird Farm since the mid-1990s and Red Deer-area Christmas Bird Count records confirm observations that they have virtually disappeared from Central Alberta. While they are still found in the northern areas of the Prairie Provinces, it appears that numbers there are also declining.

Evening Grosbeaks, like other winter finches, are social and nomadic. Flocks wander widely in response to food availability. Apparently, their range expanded rapidly during the early 20th century due to the widespread



planting of Manitoba maple (*Acer negundo*), an ornamental tree that became a major food source.

Factors contributing to their decline are thought to include tar sands exploitation (which has destroyed large swaths of its boreal breeding habitat), global climate change, pesticides (especially those used to control spruce budworm), window collisions, and being hit by cars during the winter when they gather on roads to eat road salt and grit. It is also possible that they are not moving as far south during the winter due to warmer winter temperatures. An added vulnerability is that the species is susceptible to scaly-leg, a condition caused by a tiny leg and foot scale mite (*Knemidokoptes* spp.) that often results in them losing their toes and legs. There have also been observations of individuals suffering from mycoplasmal conjunctivitis, an eye disease that typically afflicts House Finches.

Given the rarity of this species in our area, I was pleased to have the opportunity last winter to see, hear (they have a distinctive melodic call) and photograph a few individuals at a feeding station near Millarville, AB, where a small population seems to be thriving. It was encouraging to get a close-up view again of a species that we can only hope is not heading the way of the Passenger Pigeon.



*Nature Alberta Presents*  
**IMPORTANT BIRD AND BIO-DIVERSITY AREAS (IBA) WORKSHOP**

October 25 and 26, 2019  
Quality Inn and Conference Centre  
7150 50 Ave, Red Deer, AB



*This workshop will leave you more connected to the birding community and provide you with a better understanding of these important conservation sites.*

**PROGRAM**

**Friday, October 25 (NOTE: this date is the same night as the RDRN banquet)**

- 6:00 pm – 7:00 pm: Networking + Light Refreshments
- 7:30 pm – 8:30 pm: eBird Tutorial with Jody Allair from Bird Studies Canada
- 8:30 pm – 9:00 pm: Presentation + Story Map Demonstration
- 9:00 pm – 11:00 pm: Volunteer Appreciation + Networking

**Saturday, October 26:**

- 8:30 am – 8:45 am: Outline for the Day
- 8:45 am – 9:15 am: Frank Lake IBA (Greg Wagner)
- 9:15 am – 9:45 am: Chappice Lake IBA (Brook Skagen)
- 9:45 am – 10:15 am: Erskine & Ewing Lakes IBA (Dr. Charley Bird)
- 10:15 am – 10:30 pm: Health Break
- 10:30 pm – 12:30 pm: Going Forward - Where to From Here? (Round Table Discussion)
- 12:30 pm: Closing Remarks
- 12:30 pm - 1:00 pm: Lunch and Networking

Only \$20 (includes lunch). Registration must be done online: <https://www.eventbrite.ca/e/important-bird-and-biodiveristy-areas-workshop-tickets-73977190769>



**DID YOU KNOW?**

*By Susan van der Hoek*

A group of pheasants is called a **bouquet** (when flushed) and a **nye** (when on the ground). In Alberta, Ring-necked Pheasants are mostly found in the south, preferring grasslands, river valleys, coulees, farmland and wetland edges. They are not native to North America, but were introduced from China and Japan in the late 1880s.

OXFORD LIVING DICTIONARIES



# FALL BIRDING TRIP SCHEDULE

By Keith Kline

October 5: River Bend Golf & Recreation Area - Meet in the first parking lot on the right at the bottom of the hill

October 19: Gaetz Lakes Sanctuary - Meet in KWNC

October 26: Maskepetoon Park - Meet at the playground on the west side of Kerry Wood Drive

November 2: Bower Woods - Meet across the street from 37 Selkirk Blvd. in the green space

November 9: McKenzie Trails Recreation Area - Meet in the main parking lot



## CENTRAL ALBERTA BIRD SIGHTINGS 2019

Help us count bird species this year! Email your new bird sightings to [rdrn.nature@gmail.com](mailto:rdrn.nature@gmail.com). We have now recorded 183 different species (see our list at <https://birdingtrailsalberta.com/central-alberta-bird-sightings-2019/>). The challenge is open to everyone—including non-members.

RDRN is hosting a challenge to document as many bird species as possible within the area outlined in the Central Alberta Birding Trails map. <https://birdingtrailsalberta.com>. The Central Alberta Bird Checklist can be downloaded from the RDRN website.

*Rare Bird! An Anna's Hummingbird has been visiting a bird feeder in Central Alberta. More details in the next newsletter!*

*Photo by Gerry Fox*



## FLOWER FOCUS KWNC • 10:00 AM — 12:00 PM



### IN PRAISE OF WEEDS

Wednesday October 16

*Weeds are lovely flowers that we haven't yet gained an appreciation for*  
author unknown



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>

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