

## Cascading Ecological Effects of Sea Otter Reintroduction and Kelp Forest Recovery

▶ 26

November 2020  
7:30pm-9:00pm

### **RDRN Virtual Speaker Series**

Create your Zoom account.

Join the meeting here:

Meeting ID: 821 5882 1607

Passcode: 991119

Have your microphone on mute during the meeting.



All Photos Provided by Russell Markel



As a result of the North Pacific Maritime Fur Trade, Sea Otters (*Enhydra lutris*) were extirpated throughout most of their historical range from Baja California to northern Japan by the mid 1800s – the ecological, social, and economic consequences of which are still being realized today. Russell Markel, PhD will present his and his colleague's research investigating the widespread indirect effects of Sea Otter extirpation, and reintroduction, on nearshore food webs and ecosystems along the west coast of Vancouver Island, British Columbia. He will discuss the results of multiple research approaches they have employed including quantitative field studies, stable isotope ecology, and ecosystem modelling, to understand how this marine apex predator affects the diversity and productivity of marine ecosystems, as well as the cultures and economies that depend upon them.

Russell Markel, PhD is an avid naturalist, educator, ecologist, and conservation biologist. He is particularly interested in the ecological roles of top predators, the implications of variable ocean climate on marine fish population dynamics (especially rockfishes), and kelp forest ecosystems. Most recently, Russell was a postdoctoral fellow at the University of British Columbia's Institute for Resources, Environment, and Sustainability until 2013, at which time he founded an eco/educational tourism company called Outer Shores Expeditions.



Everyone Welcome  
to **join on-line.**  
For questions call:  
403-896-1189

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## INTERESTING AND UNUSUAL FEEDER PATRONS – JIM AND BONNIE POTTER

Jim and Bonnie Potter of Delburne have recorded a wide variety of species at their feeders and in their backyard. Their land supports an amazing diversity of wildlife species. Last winter, they were lucky to have a Northern Shrike spend several weeks with them! Photos by Jim Potter (Northern Shrike by Myrna Pearman).

*From Top Left: Red-backed Vole; Boreal Owl; Flying Squirrel; Long-tailed Weasel; Snowshoe Hare; Northern Shrike; White-tailed Deer*



# THE ELUSIVE RUSTY BLACKBIRD

by Myrna Pearman

When I was the Central Alberta Regional Coordinator for the Alberta Breeding Bird Atlas (ABBA) between 1987-1991, I spent much of my spare time birding in the foothills. It was while doing an ABBA survey south of Rocky Mountain House that I saw my first pair of Rusty Blackbirds. Every spring and fall since that first sighting, my searches for them have been in vain.

Finally, last fall, my luck changed. My first sightings came in September, when we were looking for Whooping Cranes north of Saskatoon. There, flitting along the edge of a small wetland, we saw them! And then we saw more, and more. Almost every small bush-lined pothole seemed to be alive with Rusty Blackbirds moving south on migration. They were sometimes seen in single flocks and sometimes in the company of Red-winged Blackbirds.

Last winter, some friends near Empress, SK had one overwinter in their yard, eating sunflower seeds. Luckily, this individual was both vocal (so I got to listen to its unique chattering) and tame (so I was able to get some photos).

Male Rusty Blackbirds in breeding plumage are a dark glossy black with light eyes, resembling small Common Grackles. The females are brownish to rusty colored with yellow eyes and a pale eyebrow. In the winter, both sexes are very distinctive, as their winter plumage is a unique rusty bronze (although their name is based on their call, which sounds like a rusty door hinge).

Rusty Blackbirds breed in wet forests, bogs, muskegs



and beaver ponds across the boreal forests of the continent. In Central Alberta, they are most commonly seen moving through on spring and fall migration. Some occasionally overwinter (there were reports of a small flock in Clive last winter) but they have never been recorded on a Central Alberta Christmas Bird Count.

Sadly, Rusty Blackbird populations have undergone one of the sharpest and most mystifying declines (on both their breeding and wintering grounds) of any North American songbird. Breeding Bird Surveys estimate that their numbers have dropped by 89% since 1966! So concerned are scientists about this precipitous decline that a Rusty Blackbird Working Group ([rustyblackbird.org](http://rustyblackbird.org)) has been formed. The loss of wooded wetland habitat is likely the main cause, especially the southeastern U.S. where about 80% of the population overwinters. The historical removal of beavers (and with them the loss of necessary wetland breeding habitat) and high mercury contamination are also possible contributing factors.

I encourage everyone to pay close attention to any blackbirds seen in Central Alberta during the spring and fall migration, and especially during the winter. If you see a Rusty Blackbird (do an online search for ID features if you don't have a good bird book), please report the sighting on eBird.



# KEITH KLINE'S GROUP BIRD WALKS

Meet at the site at 10:00 AM. Trips are usually two hours but may be longer. Dress for the weather. Bring your camera and binoculars. Everyone is welcome (you do not have to be a RDRN member to join the group).

**November 7**—Maskapetoon Park - Meet at the playground on the west side of Kerry Wood Drive in the Oriole Park subdivision

**November 14**—JJ Collett Natural Area – Directions at [jjcollett.com](http://jjcollett.com)

**November 21**—Riverbend Golf & Recreation Area Upper Trail—Meet in the parking lot at the bottom of the hill on the entrance to the golf course

**November 28**—Road trip for owls—contact Keith 403-347-6883

**December 5**—McKenzie Trails Recreation Area—Meet in main parking lot



*Why wasn't the butterfly invited to the dance?*

*Because it was a Moth Ball*

## DON WALES' FLOWER FOCUS MEETINGS: KWNC - 10:00 AM

- November 18
- December 16

Topics to be announced, check the website for details.

*Note: masks and physical distancing will be required*

## Board Notes

*Greetings from Tony, Don, Rod, Bob, Keith, Daryl, Rick, Anto, Sarah, Cliff and Susan*

Here is what we have been working on:

- We have arranged Virtual Speaker Nights by Zoom, Bird Focus Group Walk's to enjoy and also Flower Focus meetings, watch our website for details.
- Our Website, Facebook, Twitter-#RDRiverNats and Instagram-@RDRiverNats accounts are active. We now have 409 Facebook members, 257 Twitter members and 100 Instagram followers.
- Did you know that there is a Red Deer River Naturalists Scholarship of \$1,500.00 that is given out every year at the Red Deer College in November. **Eligibility:** A Red Deer College student who attended a post-secondary program in the most recent academic year. All students NOT enrolled in the Faculty of Science must contact the Chair of the Science Faculty to be considered. **Criteria:** Proficiency in any of the following areas: natural history, wildlife stewardship, wildlife protection, prevention of natural resource abuse.
- Reminder, it is membership drive time. Have you sent in your membership fees?

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.

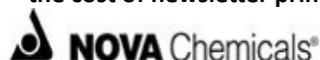
Regular virtual meetings are held at 7:30 PM on the fourth Thursday of most months. Non-members are welcome.

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

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**Photos, unless otherwise noted, by Myrna Pearman**