



# The Red Deer River Naturalist

EDITORS: MYRNA PEARMAN, SUSAN VAN DER HOEK

DECEMBER 2019

# 2019 CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT



Photo by Richard Hoeg

## Sunday, December 22



Join other Central Alberta birdwatchers by participating in the longest-running and most important bird census in the world. Contact Count Coordinator, Judy Boyd (403-358-1098) for tally sheets and count instructions.

# 2019 OWL AWARD: KEN AND LINDA LARSEN

By Rod Trentham

This year's Owl Recipients are Ken and Linda Larsen. Ken first met Michael O'Brien at the Dickson Dam hearings. The Larsen farm was affected by the dam and he wrote quite eloquently about it in one of Peter Gzowski's *Morning Side Papers* books, the 1st or 2nd. Ken and Linda joined the Red Deer River Naturalists Board in 1980. Linda and Joe Sybom edited the *Central Alberta Naturalist* which was distributed in Red Deer and the surrounding area from 1982 – 1989. The text was laid out at work bees on their farm in the days when text was typed, then glued on layout sheets in the pre-computer times. Larry Lait, who did layout for the *Red Deer Advocate*, was a big help. We were fortunate to have many members who wrote interesting articles and others who had artistic skills to share. The Colorado State University requested copies of all the editions in 1985. The first few years were very labour intensive, with Letra-set and typed in all capital letters. Linda left the Board in 1986 when they had their first child but kept working from home.

Shortly after he joined the RDRN Board, Ken was one of three members—along with the late Michael O'Brien and Eldon Neufeld and with pro-bono help from another member the late Bob Scammell—who negotiated for 16 months with Union Carbide Canada Ltd. (UCCL) to ensure Charlie and Winnie Ellis's incredible work on behalf of the Mountain Bluebirds would carry on when they were gone. The 40 page legal agreement between UCCL, the provincial government and the Ellis's was signed in March of 1982. This quiet, humble brother and sister soon after kicked off the Red Deer Community Foundation

with a \$1.6 million dollar donation along with designated funds of \$50,000.00 for five organizations within it and then \$55,000.00 to five organizations outside the Foundation. One of the beneficiaries was the Red Deer River Naturalists.

Ken followed Michael O'Brien as RDRN President in 1983 and 1984. Both were, along with other RDRN members, deeply involved in the planning of Waskasoo Park. They walked through the entire Waskasoo Park several times working with the chief planner, Craig Curtis, and others on designing trails and bike paths in as sensitive a manner as possible. With members support, they flooded Council Chambers to shut down a golf course proposal at Heritage Ranch, suggesting it go to the other end of the Park where gravel pits were located. Waskasoo Park looks like it does because of RDRN and they made sure the opportunity to finally protect the Gaetz Lake Sanctuary would not be missed. Ken Larsen, Craig Curtis and Ted Meeres won awards for this work in 1985 but no one seems to remember what the awards were. The Waskasoo Park and Gaetz Lake Sanctuary planning process won several provincial and national awards.

Linda and Ken, along with Myrna Pearman, took over editing the RDRN Newsletter in 1989 after Dorothy Murray had served in that capacity for seven years; after their second child arrived, Linda stepped back and Ken and Myrna carried on.

Along with other organizations, RDRN used to have a statutory appointment on what was then the Red Deer and District Management Board, later the Normandeau Cultural and Natural History Society – who managed the Museum, Kerry Wood Nature Centre, Fort Normandeau, Heritage Square and Heritage

Ranch. Ken served as RDRN's appointment to this Board from 1986 until 1990. (Michael O'Brien often served as a member at large). Ken once reported having attended 37 meetings in 1989 as that Board deliberated over being part of the City or being autonomous.

Ken served as a Board member with Ellis Bird Farm for 13 years. I'm not sure if that was the RDRN Statutory Appointment or if Eldon Neufeld was. Ken served as a very active member of the RDRN Board from 1980 to 1997.

The last few years he has been deeply involved in legal challenges to the Harper Government's theft of \$17 billion dollars in farmer's assets—that was the Canadian Wheat Board.

Join me in thanking Ken and Linda for all the very successful volunteer work and achievements on behalf of the Red Deer River Naturalists.

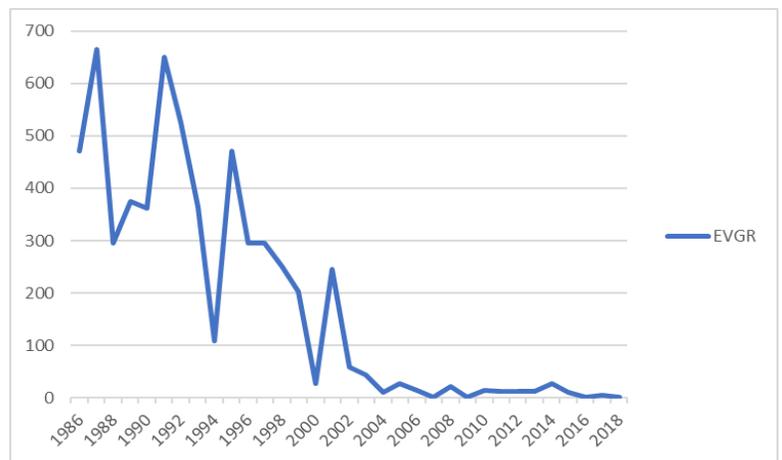
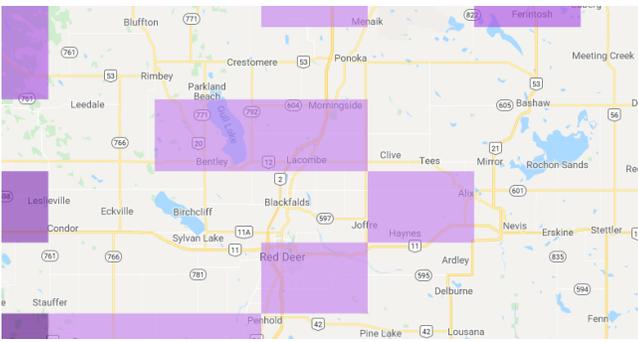


# ARE EVENING GROSBEAKS RETURNING TO CENTRAL ALBERTA?

By Myrna Pearman and Judy Boyd

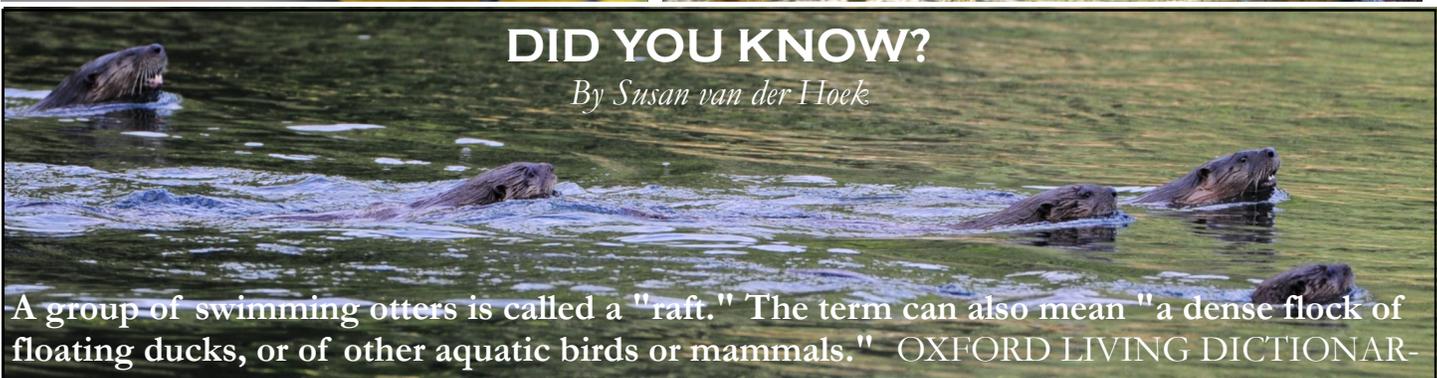
After a long period of virtual absence, it is hoped that Evening Grosbeaks (EVGR) might be increasing again in Central Alberta. They are still fairly common in the foothills area west of Red Deer, but few have been seen in the Red Deer region. Recent observations of them coming to feeders on a regular basis in the Morningside and Breton areas is heartening. On the morning of November 6, I was delighted to hear one singing in my Sylvan Lake yard. A check on eBird on November 28 indicated that a total of 15 sightings had been noted for Red Deer, AB on the weekly chart (on range map, shown below left).

As most readers know, Charlie Ellis regularly fed two tons of sunflower seeds to Evening Grosbeaks during the 1960s and 1970s. They were still feeding large flocks when I first got to know them in the mid 1980s. Thanks to Christmas Bird Count data collected by RDRN since 1986, the catastrophic decline of this species can be seen in the graph below. The graph shows that, even with peaks and valleys, the overall trend was downward until the early 2000s, when numbers dropped dramatically. Sadly, no birds at all were noted on CBCs in 2009, 2016 and 2018. Let's hope that they do make a comeback. Be sure to submit all sightings to either RDRN or eBird.



## DID YOU KNOW?

By Susan van der Hoek



A group of swimming otters is called a "raft." The term can also mean "a dense flock of floating ducks, or of other aquatic birds or mammals." OXFORD LIVING DICTIONAR-

**2019 CENTRAL ALBERTA BIRD SIGHTINGS** In January 2019, Keith Klein proposed that a bird count be conducted in Central Alberta. Observers were invited to submit bird records to RDRN. To date, 184 bird species have been tallied. If you would like to submit records to the end of December, email them to [rdrn.nature@gmail.com](mailto:rdrn.nature@gmail.com). Thanks to Judy Boyd for handling the submissions. The list to date can be seen at <https://birdingtrailsalberta.com/central-alberta-bird-sightings-2019/>

**RIGHT:** *Our thanks to Keith Kline, front left, for leading birding walks last fall. Here is a picture of the group enjoying coffee after the last walk of the season.*



**LEFT and BELOW:** *Leo de Groot of Sylvan Lake reports that two flying squirrels regularly come to visit their feeders each evening. A webcam set up in the Grain Elevator at Ellis Bird Farm confirmed that these night visitors like to dine on rabbit pellets!*



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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