



The Red Deer River Naturalist

EDITORS: MYRNA PEARMAN, SUSAN VAN DER HOEK

DECEMBER 2020

Christmas Bird Count Sunday, Dec. 20 2020



Join other Central Alberta birdwatchers by participating in the longest-running and most important bird census in the world. Contact Count Coordinator Judy Boyd to participate. Please let Judy know at 403-358-1098 or judy.boyd@shaw.ca if and where you will be counting.

Tally sheets and maps can be downloaded from RDRN website:

<https://rdrn.ca/programs/species-counts/2020-christmas-bird-count/>



All Photo by Rick Tallas

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MOLLY BANNISTER DRIVE EXTENSION (1992 – ?)

By Rod Trentham

Since 1992 when Michael O'Brien and an assistant did timed driving tours not just where Molly Banister Drive was planned for in 1996 but all over Red Deer and then sent a letter to City Administration explaining how they could save them hundreds of thousands of dollars in traffic studies -- the MBDEX issue continues. After four years of growing community opposition, on January 27, 1997, City Council voted in an 8 – 1 decision to remove the protection of the MBDEX alignment. Not to be deterred six years later, engineers, planners and managers re-introduced the “dotted line:” in the 2003/04 traffic study that gob-smacked the residents of Horizon Village, Bower subdivision, RDRN members and those who cared about Waskasoo Park. Through the course of those hearings environmental and social concerns were not even included in the discussion. There were other opportunities for public input in 2007 for example.

Recently, the Bower Sisters had offered to donate the Bower Woods Natural Area to the City provided the MBDEX would not be built. The previous Curtis administration turned the offer down. Last summer the Bowers sold their 155 acres to Melcor – who wanted the road removed while planning to add 40 acres to Waskasoo Park as they developed the field..

For the first time in 28 years, the **NEW** Administration came together and recommended amending the Southeast Major Area Structure Plan (MASP) to remove this 4-lane arterial road in a very comprehensive report – including a thorough ecological analysis from the Parks Department regarding the damage a road will do.

Unfortunately, retired City Manager, Craig Curtis had to come out publicly stating we will need this road when Red Deer's population may be **188,000** in **2054**. As if that is what Red Deer -- and the world -- will be concerned about: a four-lane arterial road. Although they worked together closely on Waskasoo Park, I wonder what Michael O'Brien would have thought about this inane statement.

Councillors Michael Dawe, Ken Johnston and Dianne Wyntjes voted with Administration to remove the road. Councillors Buck Buchanan, Tanya Handley, Vesna Higham, Lawrence Lee, and Frank Wong voted to protect the MBDEX Alignment.

The next municipal election is on Person's Day, 2021.



Michael O'Brien (1934 – 1997)

Board Notes

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

We had two successful Virtual Speaker Nights by Zoom this past October and November. Thank you to Tony for being the Moderator and to Sally Stuart who is our Speaker Coordinator. Sally has planned more for the new year. Bird Focus Group Walks and also Flower Focus meetings are finished for the year. We hope to return to those next year.

Our Website www.rdrn.ca, Facebook, Twitter #RDriverNats and Instagram @RDriverNats accounts are active. We now have 447 FB members, 257 Twitter members and 108 Instagram followers.

We would like to let you know that Keith Kline is retiring from the Board after many, many years. We thank him for all his support. Keith has also passed his Bird Focus group walks to a new host, Chris Olsen.

The Red Deer River Naturalists are in the process of organizing for 2021. We are putting together a new board which is nominated and sworn in at the January annual general meeting. The AGM is on January 28, 2021. There are nine board meetings a year. Please give this some consideration. Any questions contact us at rdrn.nature@gmail.com. We are actively recruiting for the Position of President for the new year.

Reminder, it is Membership drive time. Have you sent in your membership fees for 2021?

DID YOU KNOW? By Susan van der Hoek

A **prickle** is a collective term for a group of porcupines. Porcupines are primarily nocturnal, feeding and traveling during darkness. They are solitary and do not hibernate and are active all winter, though they seldom travel far from their dens when the ground is covered with snow. Breeding takes place in late summer and early fall, with one baby born in late April or May. These large rodents are strict herbivores, enjoying a diet of bark, berries, leaves and plants. It is easiest to see porcupines in the winter when they spend time feeding up in trees.



THE CIRCLE OF LIFE AT MY BIRD FEEDERS

By Myrna Pearman

Bird feeding stations are a microcosm of our wider environment, outdoor theatres where real-life nature dramas can be observed and experienced. I have watched many circle-of-life events unfold at and around my feeding stations, including courtship, territorial battles, the feeding and tutoring of newly fledged young, competition for food between and among species, depredation and – during the harsh winter months – a life and death struggle against the elements.



House Finch: House Finches have a long nesting season, and the males will feed the females during courtship. Both adults will also feed their newly fledged young. I watched with interest last summer as a male House Finch gorged on sunflower chips, then hurried up to a nearby branch to regurgitate lunch to another individual. I am not sure whether the recipient of his largess was his offspring or his mate.



Purple Finch: It is always heartening to see young birds, which confirm breeding success and thus another generation of avian neighbours. It was a treat to see this juvenile Purple Finch last summer (note the yellow beak gape and tufts of downy feathers on its crown) dining at the seed feeder.



Pine Siskin: Pine Siskins spend their entire lives in the company of their kith and kin. But that doesn't mean that they all get along. Bird feeding stations, which concentrate a food source in a limited area, are often scenes of intense scrapping as individuals vie with each other for the right to dine.



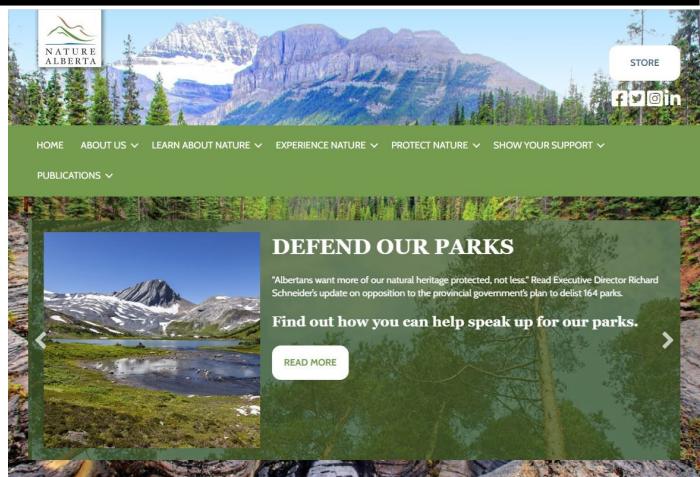
Sharp-shinned Hawk: It is always poignant when a predator bird comes screaming into the neighbourhood and grabs a feeder bird for dinner. One day last fall, I watched (with some sadness, I must admit) this Sharp-shinned Hawk ripping apart one of "my" chickadees. But the vitality of all ecosystems depends on healthy predator-prey relationships. The hawks need to eat too.

NOTICE: ALL RDRN BIRD/INSECT WALKS HAVE BEEN POSTPONED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE.

NATURE ALBERTA UPDATE

Submitted by Nature Alberta

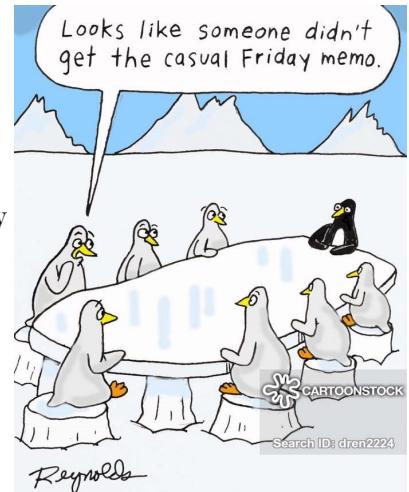
Under the leadership of Executive Director, Dr. Rick Schneider, Nature Alberta has updated their website (<https://naturealberta.ca/>) and is embarking on some exciting new initiatives. The new website provides the foundation for the Nature Network. It is organized around three core themes: 1) Learn About Nature, 2) Experience Nature, and 3) Protect Nature. The intent is to serve as the central hub for everything to do with nature in Alberta. This includes providing a provincial platform for all of the nature clubs in the federation. Clubs are now organized by region, making it easy for web users to find clubs in their area (<https://naturealberta.ca/member-clubs/>).



Nature Alberta has also expanded their delivery—through their magazine—of high-quality nature-related content. The magazine contains information on species, conservation issues, urban nature, citizen science and much more. There is also a dedicated section for kids and their parents. The scope and quality of this content is unparalleled. What makes it all possible is that everything is sourced from the extended naturalist community. Individuals like Myrna Pearman (formerly with Ellis Bird Farm) and Margo Hervieux (Peace Park Naturalists) are submitting natural history articles while field biologists (e.g., Jennifer Earle and Pat Fargey) are submitting articles on species conservation efforts and academic scientists (e.g., Gail Michener and Colleen St. Clair) are sharing the findings of their biological research. The naturalist community has tremendous knowledge and capacity, and together we can accomplish much more than any single organization could. This is the core strength of the Nature Network.

In December, Nature Alberta will be hiring a part-time coordinator for the Nature Network initiative, allowing the organization to move forward with some of the other ideas

that arose during their initial meetings with member clubs last July. One of the first steps will be to establish a high-quality photo library that can be shared among clubs for use in their communications. Over time, this will be expanded into a broader library of resources that Clubs can draw on. Again, Nature Alberta's role will be to serve as the coordinator; the content will come from individuals in the network, who we know have a great breadth of experience and knowledge.



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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