

2020 OWL AWARD: DOROTHY MURRAY

When Dorothy (and Dr. Sandy) Murray returned to Red Deer in 1980, one of the first organizations they joined was the Red Deer River Naturalists. Dorothy had earned a degree in Zoology at the University of Alberta and she found that the RDRN meetings and outings provided rich supplementary learning. She fondly recalls crawling around on her knees examining wildflowers with Helen Harris and Minnie Cunningham, two RDRN wildflower experts.

Dorothy and Sandy's young sons, Fraser and Kolin accompanied them on RDRN outings in and around Red Deer. Each outing was a learning experience and a time of camaraderie with like-minded Naturalists.

Dorothy produced 56 newsletters during the time she served as the RDRN newsletter editor from 1982 to 1989. When she retired from this position three people took over the task! She typed the newsletter up at their home, drove it out to Union Carbide to photocopy it, then handled the mailing.

For a few years, the RDRN also printed *The Central Alberta Naturalist*, a newsprint publication that Dorothy did some typing for. She wrote the Children's Corner column under the name "Chickadee" and Sandy wrote a "Did You Know That" column.

Dorothy also served on the RDRN Board in 1987 and 1988, and was active on the planning committee for the 1991 Canadian Nature Federation conference. Her role was coordinating and delivering the youth program for the conference.

The opening of the Kerry Wood Nature Centre was a huge event for the Red Deer River Naturalists. From day one, Dorothy was involved with the KWNC. She delivered school programs for a short time and served on the KWNC Association Board for ten years, chair-

ing the board for a couple of years and volunteering as the Bookstore Manager for eight. She has been the person at the front desk most Tuesdays since 1986.

Another big moment for RDRN was the opening of our office when KWNC expanded in 2005. Dorothy was part of the official opening party. She continues to serve as a RDRN ambassador at the front desk explaining to people who we are and what we do.

Fortunately for the RDRN, Dorothy kept the records of Sandy's presentations during a busy and critical time for RDRN (e.g.: opening of KWNC, mosquito control presentation to Red Deer City Council). Some of these records may be in the Red Deer and District Archives, but she also has personal copies on hand.

We thank Dorothy for her dedication to RDRN and are pleased to present her, along with Sandy, a 2020 Owl Award.



TONY BLAKE'S 2020 PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Once again its time to look back on the past year and document the happenings that have affected our society, thank the folks who helped us, and look toward our future.

It started out rather well. Anto Davis, Ariane Inman and Cliff Soper came on the board as promising new directors but we had hardly put them to work before the pandemic hit and disrupted our plans. Unfortunately, Ariane had to move to Edmonton half-way through the year. Sarah Grass, Cliff Soper, Susan van der Hoek and Keith Kline will also be stepping back this year. Thanks to all of you for your service to the RDRN. We owe a special debt to Keith for his calm manner and unfailing service over his many years on our board, and to Susan for her expertise and untold volunteer hours.

2020 PROGRAM

COVID19 played havoc in 2020 but remember the RDRN was strong enough to make it through the Spanish influenza epidemic of 1918. A simple virus won't stop us. Don Wale's Flower focus sessions, the Battle River Camp-out, this year's casino fund-raiser, and the fall banquet had to be cancelled, but our organization gradually adapted to the new reality. ZOOM proved to be an invaluable tool in salvaging our season and in some ways it has helped us move ahead. Once the board of directors learned a few on-line meeting skills they were able to resume a normal schedule and a few extra sessions were actually thrown in on short notice.

Live speaker nights scheduled for the spring events had to be cancelled, but this fall we figured out how to hold virtual speaker nights, and we were very pleased with the way they turned out. Attendance didn't really suffer, and we discovered that ZOOM makes it easy to bring in speakers from almost anywhere. For example when Russell Markel spoke to us about sea otters in November, he didn't even have to leave his home on the B.C. coast. It will be great to assemble in the same room again, but don't be surprised if we keep making virtual presentations when the opportunities arise. Thanks to Sally Stuart for arranging another season of fascinating presentations.

After a late start, Bird Focus, which was organized by Keith Klein, was able to carry through an fairly complete season of weekly birding trips to local destinations. The groups were often led by regular attendees including Ariane Inman, Lynnette Asselstine-Braun and Chris Olsen. Chris has graciously offered to take over from Keith next spring and we can look forward to some interesting trips.

As usual, Judy Boyd organized and tabulated the annual Central Alberta May Species Count and Christmas Bird Count. Thank you Judy for your tireless work on behalf of RDRN and nature!

RDRN members were active supporting the work of other nature organizations in 2020 including Nature Alberta, Piper Creek Restoration Agriculture Project, and the Lacombe Lake Watershed Society.

Presenting RDRN's Owl Award for extraordinary service was a little complicated this year since we couldn't hold a banquet. However, we still managed to safely deliver the award to Sandy and Dorothy Murray and celebrate their accomplishments in our newsletter and social media.

As a long-time advocate for nature and conservation, people look to the RDRN to provide perspective on development issues. The controversy over the Molly Banister Drive extension erupted one more time last year as Melcor Developments and the city of Red Deer administration attempted to put this horrible idea out of its misery. Rod Trentham made it his mission to inform every citizen of Red Deer about the real costs of fragmenting our treasured parks system for an unnecessary road. Even though city council refused to abandon the Molly Banister right-of-way, the road will not be built anytime soon. As the city's transportation needs change over time, there will be even fewer reasons to build it.

Land use planning by municipal governments is something we should be monitoring more closely. No one else is here to advocate for functioning habitat corridors (such as Piper Creek, Waskasoo Creek and the river valley). Councilors and developers seldom see the world through naturalists' eyes. We have to help them understand the environmental, social, and economic advantages of leaving certain strategic areas for nature and wildlife.

2020 SUPPORT

The good work of RDRN members is enabled, supported and encouraged and by a few volunteers who toil away in support roles: filling in forms and reports, writing and distributing newsletters, updating web-sites and social media, recording meeting minutes, tracking members, issuing cheques and receipts, and balancing accounts. Susan Van der Hoek, Bob Kruchten, Myrna Pearman, Sally Stuart and Rick Tallas made it happen last year and we are in their debt.

We also depend on the services of non-members and contractors to keep ourselves in business. This is a good opportunity to remember the staff from Kerry Wood Nature Centre, Waskasoo Environmental Education Society, City of Red Deer Parks Department, City Hall Print Room, Nature Alberta and the many others who always give the RDRN a little extra.

RDRN endeavors to keep its members informed of conservation issues in our region and our province through its print and social media.

Continued on page 6.

