

25 Years in Africa: Ecology, Music and Education

Join us for a Zoom meeting with Dr. Randy Arsenault

25 February 2021

7:30pm-9:00pm

RDRN Virtual Series

Meeting ID: 845 9006 7071

Passcode: 995782



Zoom in with us as Dr. Randy Arsenault draws from his experiences during his time in Africa. Bringing together students, educators and researchers working in ecology, conservation, education and health in Africa, benefitting local communities.

Dr. Randal Arsenault has spent 25 years in Africa conducting research on large herbivores, making music, and bringing students to study.

Inspired by Paul Simon's Graceland and Lion King, Arsenault backpacked 12 countries, completed his doctorate on large grazing herbivores in South Africa, and recorded four albums under the name Dr. Zoo. He has taught ecology with Lethbridge College, UofA and now proudly with Red Deer College. Current projects include children's music, videos and educational theatre under the name Zebra and the Moose and, in the not-too-distant future, field courses around Red Deer, the Rockies and Africa.



Dr. Randal Arsenault



Ian Lindsay



Anthony Trivet



Ramona Kenast



Jean Vdmeulen

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Red Deer River Naturalists



www.rdrn.ca



2020 OWL AWARD: DR. SANDY MURRAY

The Murrays joined the RDRN right after they moved back to Red Deer in 1980. It was a very busy period for the organization. Negotiations were underway for the Ellis Bird Farm agreement and Waskasoo Park planning had begun in the fall of 1981. After joining the Board, Sandy went on to serve as President in 1985 – 1986.

There are so many issues listed in the 1985 President's report! Naturalists across the country combined forces to protest cuts to National Parks, environmental research, the Canadian Wildlife Service, and to alternate energy research. We joined the Haida in an attempt to end clear cut logging on South Moresby Island. There was the "Blob" in the St. Claire River that represented a fraction of "the 200,000 tons of toxic waste dumped into that river daily" (interestingly millions have been spent on that river over the last 35 years to great effect) and the many other rivers in Canada including the Red Deer. In his report, Sandy noted "If we stopped polluting now (1985), it would take at least 200 years to clean up the Great Lakes." Provincially, there was Don Sparrow's Eastern Slopes policy to deal with, as well as the sale of public lands, hearings on ecological reserves, and the initiation of the Butcher Creek discussions in partnership with the Junior Forest Wardens. There was unruly opposition to this proposal out at the Garrington Community Centre. Members also presented briefs at the South Saskatchewan Basin River Basin and about the CPR right-of-way as it was moving out of downtown.

Locally, there was excitement as the Kerry Wood Nature Centre was under construction.

In the midst of these activities, RDRN had 40 outings that year, organized volunteers to rescue yellow lady slipper orchids from highway construction, and got involved in the annual Bluebird Festival as well as other community events. The official opening of the Kerry Wood Nature Centre on August 4, 1986 was an exciting day for the Red Deer River Naturalists. Sandy's remarks were four pages double spaced but he certainly summarized the history of the Sanctuary, explaining how John Jost and Grace Gaetz played an early role in preserving it for the community, how Alberta Natural History Society played a role in making it a Federal Bird Sanctuary, and how Kerry Wood worked tirelessly to protect it from many threats (including clear cutting, amusement parks, gravel pits, fires and roads). RDRN hosted 39 summer outings in 1986.

Shortly after the opening of Waskasoo Park came the annual mosquito debate. Sandy appeared before council and totally discredited a paper that had been presented by a pro-spraying Dr. Louise Jackson and her group. Council decided not to spray. It became an election issue that fall (Sandy

wrote a blistering letter about that). With the assistance and persistence of his friend, Michael O'Brien, the swing vote 5 – 4 turned out to be Councillor Gail Surkan.

In the El Nino spring of 1987, the City hired Grant Moir's company to experiment with the *Bacillus thuringiensis israelensis* (Bti) alternative that kills mosquito and black fly larvae. It worked well. Grant was hired the next year to employ this and other strategies. This program led to the Eco-spaces Management Plan and both received national attention and an Emerald Award. Sandy's presentation before Council was a turning point.

After his term as RDRN President, Sandy went on to serve as President of the Alberta Medical Association and founded the AMA Committee on Environmental Health and served as its Chairman. He made a presentation to the public hearings opposing the development of the Alberta Pacific (ALPAC) pulp and paper mill.

Dorothy and Sandy have been members of RDRN for over 40 years and continue to be involved in environmental actions in Alberta, Canada and the world.

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



CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT (CBC) 2020 BY JUDY BOYD

The 2020 CBC was held on December 20. We had 116 observers (up from last year's 86) record a total of 50 species (up from last year's 49) and 6,605 individual birds (down from last year's 7,536). *NOTE: Participant lists and other CBC details will be included in the March 2021 newsletter.*

	2019	2020
Canada Goose	1971	112
Mallard	1091	131
Common Goldeneye	58	14
Common Merganser	5	1
Gray Partridge	0	18
Ruffed Grouse	4	16
Common Loon	0	1
Bald Eagle	12	21
Northern Goshawk	1	1
Red-tailed Hawk	0	1
American Coot	0	4
Killdeer	0	1
Rock Pigeon	360	829
Eurasian Collared-Dove	10	5
Great Horned Owl	3	8
Great Gray Owl	0	1CW
Northern Saw-whet Owl	1	2
Belted Kingfisher	2	2
Downy Woodpecker	103	122
Hairy Woodpecker	44	49
Northern Flicker	17	28
Pileated Woodpecker	20	16
Merlin	1	3
Prairie Falcon	1 CW	2
Northern Shrike	8	2
Canada (Gray) Jay	9	16
Blue Jay	122	142
Black-billed Magpie	459	531
American Crow	2	30
Common Raven	229	473
Black-capped Chickadee	844	859
Boreal Chickadee	16	27
Red-breasted Nuthatch	22	48
White-breasted Nuthatch	81	81
Brown Creeper	1	3
American Dipper	1	1
Golden-crowned Kinglet	0	10
American Robin	1	12
European Starling	15	18
Bohemian Waxwing	368	1337
Cedar Waxwing	5	16

Snow Bunting	432	125
Dark-eyed Junco	12	15
Red-winged Blackbird	0	30CW
Pine Grosbeak	71	211
House Finch	153	92
Common Redpoll	82	410
Hoary Redpoll	1	8
Pine Siskin	210	12
Evening Grosbeak	1	17
House Sparrow	655	652
Total individuals	7536	6605

**Great
Backyard
Bird Count!
February
12-15th**
birdcount.org

JOB OPPORTUNITY

The RDRN is looking to hire an **Administrative Manager** on a four-month contract. The position may be expanded/extended at the end of the contract period.

The successful applicant will work under the direction of and in consultation with an assigned RDRN committee to:

- assist with the development and implementation of a new strategic plan
- lead an initiative to increase RDRN public profile and membership
- support the work undertaken by various RDRN Committees
- update the RDRN Policy Manual
- assist with financial management matters (with a focus on long-term sustainability)
- assist with reorganizing the RDRN office and an update of RDRN office equipment as well as computer systems and relevant software
- oversee the organizing and archiving of historical RDRN records
- assist with/oversee RDRN social media/website updates
- advise and assist with identifying and facilitating potential projects, funding opportunities, partnerships and issues of importance to the Society
- act as the Recording Secretary, as required, at RDRN board, committee and monthly meetings
- as directed, undertake other office, secretarial, administrative, financial, staffing, fund-raising, grant-writing, management and related duties

The position will entail working at home as well as at the RDRN office in the Kerry Wood Nature Centre. The successful applicant will attend zoom/in person meetings as required. This position will involve approximately 2 days per week for 17 weeks (April 1 – July 31) @ \$25.00/hour : \$6,800.00.

**Please send cover letter and resume to
myrnapearman.nature@gmail.com
Deadline: February 28, 2021**

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

President's Report cont.

2020 ISSUES: Last March the province suddenly rescinded a policy that protected 1.5 million hectares of mountains and foothills from coal mining and loosened application and development requirements for new mines. Half a dozen new mines have been proposed and as we speak coal exploration activities are cutting new trails and bore holes into sensitive habitats and increasing the risk of serious erosion in critical watersheds. Even after reclamation, open pit mines have not been able to prevent unacceptable levels of selenium and other toxic compounds from leaching into our water supplies.

Conservation NGO's such as CPAWS and the AWA have developed well-reasoned positions on coal development and watershed protection and I urge RDRN members to check them out. Let your elected representatives know how you feel about the fleeting benefits of coal extraction, and if you believe those benefits are worth the risk to our land and water.

Last year we were also shocked to learn about the province's intention to divest itself of dozens of parks and other "underused" protected areas. With the rush to safe outdoor pursuits in the midst of the COVID pandemic, ordinary Albertans have discovered the real value of our beleaguered parks system and usage has increased significantly. The issue has been quiet for a few months, but the plan has not gone away.

There are several other issues in the news that naturalists have been aware of for many years including: gravel extraction in riparian areas, orphaned oil and gas facilities that threaten human health as well as the environment, burgeoning populations of invasive species that go undetected and uncontrolled, and incremental losses of critical habitat that reduce biodiversity and ecological functions. Naturalists are on the front line because they are usually the first to notice the effects of these human-caused problems. This important work and RDRN needs to do more to support it.

LOOKING FORWARD: *Nature 2021* is a new initiative that we hope will launch the RDRN into a higher league of relevance and effectiveness. This summer the board plans to hire a full-time naturalist. The person we hire will run an ambitious interpretive program but even more importantly we want them to start on Central Alberta's first comprehensive inventory of wildlife habitat assets.

We have a lot of habitat: pieces of every size and description: owned by governments, corporations, NGO's, and private individuals; some pristine and complete and others severely degraded and fragmented; some well-protected and others under imminent threat. Our goal is to use our staff and volunteer resources to

map and rank every significant piece over the next few years. With this kind of data, we can work to protect and enhance the region's most strategic pieces, and we can encourage other stakeholders to do the same. We can confidently hire staff to carry out *Nature 2021* thanks to the Jaffary/Tack bequest mentioned in last year's report. However, we need to make our programs financially sustainable and not rely on reserves. We intend to apply for grants and solicit donations to support this project as well as many others.

Becoming an employer is a huge but necessary step for our organization to grow and achieve its potential. Employees and programs have to be supervised supported by competent reliable people working behind the scenes. A volunteer board has a hard time supporting more than a couple of employees and in order to grow and succeed we have to make changes. We have been working with a coach from Alberta Community Development to develop a more robust committee system that frees up the board to concentrate on policy, fund raising and planning. In time, we could have a professional manager running our day-to-day operations, coordinating volunteers, and assisting the board and committees with their work. At our strategic planning sessions, we identified all sorts of ideas and initiatives that could help us achieve our triple goals of nature education, appreciation and conservation. I think a full time manager will have more than enough to do.

It might not look like it, but we have come a long way since last year. We still have a long way to go but as I step away from the President's position, I know that we have some great people ready to propel us forward. The first few weeks may be rough but great things are going to happen.

Greetings from the Board - Tony, Don, Rod, Bob, Daryl, Rick, Anto, Travis, Kirstin, Christine, Myrna, Dean

Website www.rdrn.ca; Facebook; Twitter #RDdriverNats and Instagram @RDdriverNats. We have 461 Facebook members, 261 Twitter members and 158 Instagram followers.

RDRN is pleased to introduce the 2021 Board: President: Tony Blake, 1st VP: Myrna Pearman, 2nd VP: Rick Tallas Secretary: No nominations-if you are interested contact the Board, Treasurer: Bob Kruchten, Directors: Christine Farries, Travis Boschman, Dean Baayens, Kirstin Bouwsema, Daryl Beck, Don Wales, Rod Trentham, Anto Davis. We welcome them all to their new positions. Dr. Sally Stuart, our Speaker Coordinator has organized more virtual series Speakers starting this month.

Board Notes

Reminder: 2021 memberships are due!

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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