

# The Red Deer River Naturalist



December 2022 Editors: Myrna Pearman & Susan van der Hoek



## Central Alberta Annual

Sunday

December 18, 2022

# Christmas BIRD COUNT

Digitally enhanced, winter bird compilation of naturalists' art from the 1800s (public domain).



Join other Central Alberta Birdwatchers by participating in the longest-running and most important bird census in the world.

Contact Count Compiler, Judy Boyd (403-358-1098) to sign up.

For more information and instructions about the Count go to [www.rdrn.ca](http://www.rdrn.ca)

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# Board Notes

**Rick Tallas, President**

RDRN continues to be busy on several fronts. We are still looking for board and committee members. Feel free to contact us if you are interested ([rdrn.nature@gmail.com](mailto:rdrn.nature@gmail.com))!

- Dr. Natalia Lifshitz continues to work on the Nature Central database and website ([www.naturecentral.org](http://www.naturecentral.org)).
- Our Communications Committee is busy working on updating the website.
- We will have a booth at the Red Deer Rebels game on December 3.
- A committee met with Alberta Parks this month to discuss procedures related to leading formal trips in Alberta parks and recreation areas. We will have more details on this issue in the new year.
- We are working on formalizing an External Grant Request procedure.
- RDRN hosted a well-received appreciation dinner for board members and key volunteers in November. We are very grateful to everyone who works hard on behalf of RDRN!
- Our monthly meetings continue to attract good crowds. Our thanks to RDP instructors who encourage their students to attend our meetings!

## IN THE ALBERTA WILDERNESS:

By *Don Auten*

Alberta is home to all three species of North American weasels. This Long-tailed Weasel is the largest of the three, followed in size by the Short-tailed Weasel and the smallest of the three, the Least Weasel, which is not much larger than the voles they prey upon.

In the northern regions, weasels turn white in the winter to camouflage them against the snow. In warmer climates, they remain brown all year-round.

Central Alberta is the northern edge of the Long-tailed Weasels' range, which extends south into South America.



## DID YOU KNOW *By Susan van der Hoek*

A group of bison (also called buffalo) is called a gang, herd, troop or obstinacy. Two subspecies of bison have historically existed in Alberta: Plains Bison (*Bison bison bison*) and Wood Bison (*Bison bison athabasca*).

Bison are grazers, preferring wet meadows in the boreal ecoregion and grassy areas of the prairies, occupying a unique niche among North American herbivores. Today in Alberta, due to massive conservation efforts, there are an estimated 2,800 free-ranging wild Wood Bison and about 700 in captivity. All of the Plains Bison in Alberta are semi-wild, captive or farmed herds.

Elk Island National Park houses roughly 500 semi-wild Plains Bison. Banff National Park reintroduced Plains Bison to the park in February 2017, as of fall 2022 there are 80 individuals. Parks Canada is approaching the end of the five-year Plains Bison Reintroduction Pilot. To mark this conclusion, Parks Canada has prepared its *Report on the Bison Reintroduction Pilot 2017 – 2022*. <https://www.pc.gc.ca/en/pn-np/ab/banff/info> You can help guide the discussion for the future of plains bison in Banff National Park! Parks Canada values your feedback, you're encouraged to get involved by sending your comments to [opinion@pc.gc.ca](mailto:opinion@pc.gc.ca).



## BIRD FOCUS GROUP

By Chris Olsen

Note: The Bird Focus Group walks will commence in March, 2023.

**December 3** – Riverbend Perimeter Trail – meet in the main parking lot.

**December 10** – Gaetz Lakes Sanctuary. This will be our last scheduled walk for the year. Keith Kline has kindly volunteered to organize coffee and treats to follow (about 1:00 PM) at the Kerry Wood Nature Centre. We'll use that opportunity to debrief our season, so even if you can't make the walk, try and come out to enjoy the group and to share your feedback and ideas/suggestions for next year.

**December 18** – Central Alberta Christmas Bird Count (see insert)



## CONFERENCE REPORT

By Myrna Pearman

I was pleased to attend the first Canadian “Advancing Women in Conservation Summit” in Saskatoon, Sk on November 4-6<sup>th</sup>. Sponsored by the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation, the Summit brought women from across Canada together to network, build strong leadership skills, and come together to facilitate a stronger, more empowered community of women in the conservation field. The goals of the Summit were to identify barriers and challenges to leadership, to discuss solutions, and to maximize opportunities for women working/volunteering in conservation.

The Summit consisted of plenary sessions, break-out sessions, and a field trip to the Wanuskewin Heritage Centre.

After a land acknowledgement and blessing by Elder Rosemary Bird, we were treated to presentations ranging from a rather dry but important summary by a representative from Eco Canada (*Growing and Diversifying the Nature Conservation Workforce*) to interactive sessions (*Finding Your Voice and Confidence during Meetings, Confidence in Public Speaking*), panel discussions focusing on the importance of mentorship and “finding your voice,” an inspiring keynote address by world-renowned underwater explorer Jill Heinerth (Explorer-in-Residence with the Royal Canadian Geographical Society), a description of career opportunities for women in a session entitled *Natural Resource Management and Empowering the Next Generation*, and several sessions focusing on networking.

The field trip to the Wanuskewin Heritage Park was very interesting and enlightening. The park is located outside the city and contains one of the most important pre-contact sites in the country, with a 6,000-year record of occupation by many different First Nations cultural groups. In partnership with the Mee-wasin Valley Authority and the City of Saskatoon, Wanuskewin Heritage Park became a Provincial Heritage Property in 1983 and was declared a National Historical Site in 1987. In 1992, the Interpretive Centre and walking trails were opened to the public. Application has been recently made to have it designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Our group was treated to the experience of erecting a small teepee, with an explanation by a young Indigenous woman of the significance of each of the 15 poles used. We also toured the exceptional exhibits and were treated to Bannock and “muskeg” tea. Unfortunately, no outdoor tours were possible due to a fierce winter storm that descended on Friday night and raged all weekend.

The Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation is a non-government organization of hunters, trappers, anglers and shooters. As such, many of the attendees were from the hunting community, including one presenter who was an “award winning” trophy bow hunter. Despite some stark and fundamental differences in viewpoints between consumptive and non-consumptive conservationists, most of the presenters focused on the important shared goals of protecting natural ecosystems, getting people outdoors, and supporting/networking with other women in the field of conservation. I appreciate RDRN providing funding support to cover the cost of registration as well as one night's accommodation of this three-day conference.

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## MOLLY BANISTER DRIVE EXTENSION (MBDEX): 1991 – 2023

By Rod Trentham

I'm not sure if RDRN was involved in discussions about this issue prior to 1991 but I do know it has been at least 32 years now. After overwhelming public opposition, City Council voted to remove protection of the MBDEX in 1997 in an 8-1 vote. Engineers and planners just refused to remove the dotted line. The Bower sisters had offered to donate the ecologically diverse Bower Woods Natural Area to the City; then City Manager, Craig Curtis refused it. Once again, as in 2020, City Administration has recommended amending the Municipal Development Plan Bylaw 3404/A-2022 and the East Hill Major Area Structure Plan Bylaw 3499/A-2022 to REMOVE PROTECTION of the MBDEX crossing. In 2020, City Council voted against Administrations recommendation in a 5-3 vote. Public Hearings for the 2nd and 3rd Readings will take place starting at 3:00 pm, January 16, in Council Chambers, with a maximum of five minutes allotted per presentation. Proposed Bylaws can be viewed at: [www.reddeer.ca/publichearings](http://www.reddeer.ca/publichearings). Email your comments to: [publichearings@reddeer.ca](mailto:publichearings@reddeer.ca) or drop off written comments at City Hall (4914-48 Ave): Attn: Red Deer City Council c/o Clerk, Legal and Legislative Services. Comments can also be mailed to Red Deer City Council, Clerk and Legislative Services, Box 5008, Red Deer, AB T4N 3T4. **Deadline: January 6, 2023**

Waskasoo Park is Red Deer's contiguous, riparian jewel and MBDEX would go right through it. Let's hope January 16, 2023 marks the end of this discussion for good. My hope is that some day we will have the Dorothy and Ruth Bower Pedestrian Crossing -- for bikes, e-bikes, skate boards, e-boards, scooters, e-scooters, e-wheel chairs within easy access to far more than “soup to nuts”!

# 2022 OWL AWARD

## SUSAN VAN DER HOEK

The RDRN is pleased to present the 2022 Owl Award to **Susan van der Hoek**. Susan has been actively involved with RDRN on so many fronts, with many of her contributions being “behind the scenes.” We thank Susan for her tireless efforts on behalf of RDRN

### SUSAN:

- Was a board member from August 2016 to February 2019 and was secretary from February 2019 to January 2021. She kindly volunteered to act as Recording Secretary in the fall of 2022 for two board meetings.
- Was the very able coffee coordinator from October 2016 to January 2020, when meetings were no longer held due to covid.
- From September 2016 to March 2019, handled the newsletter and poster pick up, stuffed envelopes for mailing, then returned the newsletters to the city for mailing.
- In the spring of 2018, assisted with the map updates and editing, with Doug Pedersen and Judy Boyd, of the Central Alberta Birding Trail guide.
- Became Administrator of our Facebook/Twitter accounts in October 2014 and started posting to Instagram in 2020. She works tirelessly to post all events, monitor traffic every day, ban spammers and post interesting articles
- In February 2017, became our webmaster, and regularly posts events, upcoming speaker details, the newsletter, and other editing/updating as needed. She also emails out all the public service announcements to central Alberta newspapers/digital news and radio stations re: upcoming events from her own email account. She also handles any inquiries related to these PSAs.
- Between February 2019 and January 2021, worked on updating the Policies and Procedures manual as well as the RDRN manual, the Standard Operating Manual and the RDRN history documentation.
- With Myrna Pearman, is co-editor of the newsletter, contributes a “Did You Know” column and provides social media stats.
- Since February 2018, has coordinated – with speaker coordinator Sally Stuart and graphic designer Doug Pedersen - the production of the monthly posters.
- Since April 2021, has sat on the Communications Committee, which produced a new brochure and is currently working to create an updated website.

Susan has been married to her husband Wim for 40 years. They have two daughters Lyndsay (Matt) and Maria (Drew) as well as two granddaughters - Lennon and Violet.



**Social Media:**  
**736 Facebook Members**  
**390 Twitter Followers**  
**305 Instagram Followers**

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 7:00 PM on the fourth Thursday of most months at Kerry Wood Nature Centre. 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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