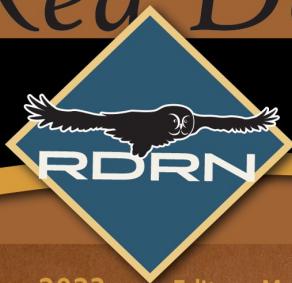


# The Red Deer River Naturalist



February 2023

Editors: Myrna Pearman & Susan van der Hoek



## What's the Buzz, Red Deer? Bumbling Through Understanding Urban Bee Ecology

23

FEBRUARY  
2023

7:00 PM

KERRY WOOD  
NATURE  
CENTRE  
RED DEER



Charity Brière studied entomology at the University of Alberta and completed her BSc in 1999. While living under a rock professionally while being a stay-at-home mom, she kept herself entomologically engaged any way she could. Completing aquatic invertebrate taxonomy certification, for working on private contracts, serendipitously lead to teaching casually at Red Deer Polytechnic. At the same time, trying her hand at beekeeping for a few years, Charity realized that the *Save The Bees* messaging out there is usually missing details about which bees need the help, so she shifted her focus to learning about and promoting the ecology of wild bees. She took on a MSc thesis to explore how bumble bees may be impacted by hobby beekeeping right here in the City of Red Deer and has been re-landscaping her front yard into wild bee habitat just in case some bees want to move in - so far it looks like they do! As an instructor at RDP, a member of the RDRN, and a board member of the Alberta Native Bee Council, Charity is grateful to be involved in exploring and sharing this important and fascinating aspect of Red Deer's unique landscape & ecology.

All are Welcome

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Charity Brière

# 2022 CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

## BY JUDY BOYD, CBC COUNT COORDINATOR

	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>
Canada Goose	95	0
Mallard	709	33
Bufflehead	2	0
Common Goldeneye	263	15
Common Merganser	0	2
Ruffed Grouse	15	10
Gray Partridge	60	78
Rock Pigeon	576	229
Eurasian Collared-Dove	16	10
American Coot	0	3
Sharp-shinned Hawk	1CW	0
Northern Goshawk	3	0
Bald Eagle	7	5
Rough-legged Hawk	1	0
Great Horned Owl	8	1
Snowy Owl	1	0
Great Gray Owl	0	1
Short-eared Owl	6	0
Northern Saw-whet Owl	1CW	1CW
American Three-toed Wp	1CW	0
Black-backed Woodpecker	2	1
Downy Woodpecker	118	124
Hairy Woodpecker	43	52
Northern Flicker	36	27
Pileated Woodpecker	8	8
Merlin	4	1
Northern Shrike	5	1
Canada (Gray) Jay	6	1
Blue Jay	143	107
Black-billed Magpie	616	323
American Crow	31	14
Common Raven	208	316
Black-capped Chickadee	691	586
Mountain Chickadee	0	1
Boreal Chickadee	18	14
Horned Lark	0	196
Bohemian Waxwing	696	66
Cedar Waxwing	0	1
Red-breasted Nuthatch	27	25
White-breasted Nuthatch	75	63
Brown Creeper	1	1
European Starling	3	1
Townsend's Solitaire	1	0
American Robin	4	2
House Sparrow	1050	649
Evening Grosbeak	6	9
Pine Grosbeak	98	0
House Finch	192	131

Purple Finch	15	0
Common Redpoll	6143	14
Hoary Redpoll	19	0
White-winged Crossbill	19	0
Pine Siskin	69	0
American Goldfinch	4	20
Snow Bunting	1290	958
American Tree Sparrow	2	16
Dark-eyed Junco	10	92
White-throated Sparrow	1	0
Red-winged Blackbird	0	2
Common Grackle	1	0
<b>Total individuals</b>	<b>13417</b>	<b>4209</b>



The 2022 Christmas Bird Count was held on December 18. We had 82 observers (down from last year's 99) record a total of 43 species (down from last year's 50) and 4209 individual birds (down from last year's 13,417 and the lowest number of individual birds counted since 1986.) We also had 1 Count Week Bird (seen 3 days before or after the Count Day but not seen on the Day): Northern Saw-whet Owl. The highest number of species recorded since 1986 happened in 2004 with 61 species and the highest number of individual birds recorded was in 2005 with 14,540 birds counted.

The reason for this low number of birds was the weather. It was bitterly cold with windchills in the -30's. Blowing snow caused drifting on the roads. Counters were getting stuck. (1 even had \$2000 damage to his car from hitting a snowbank.) Some counters wouldn't try some of the roads that they normally counted on because of the drifting. Another reason for the low count is that the Bohemian Waxwings and Common Redpolls hadn't arrived yet in large numbers. Last year we had 6143 Common Redpolls (an all time high) while this year we only had 14.

For the first time ever, we got 196 Horned Larks near Dry Island Buffalo Jump Provincial Park.

### Details:

Temperature: -2 to -34 C; Wind speed: 5 to 39 km/hr; Precipitation: snow flurries in various locations; Wind direction: variable; Snow cover: patchy crusty 10.16 to 60.96 cm; Variable cloudiness. Walked: 7 hr 20 min, 11.1

**Thank you Judy! We appreciate your Count Coordinator skills!**



**RDRN Social Media:**  
**768 Facebook Members**  
**308 Twitter Followers**  
**393 Instagram Followers**

# PRESIDENT'S REPORT: RICK TALLAS

2022 is now in the history book. RDRN continues to be engaged in many different initiatives:

1. **BIRD FOCUS** – weekly bird walks with Chris Olsen
2. **FLOWER FOCUS** – monthly meetings with Don Wales
3. **MAY SPECIES COUNT AND CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS** – Judy Boyd is our able Count Coordinator
4. **MONTHLY MEETINGS FEATURING INTERESTING SPEAKERS** – Sally Stuart is our Speaker Coordinator.
5. **MONTHLY NEWSLETTER** – Myrna Pearman and Susan van der Hoek are the Newsletter Editors.
6. **SOCIAL MEDIA** – thanks to Susan van der Hoek, we have an active social media presence on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.
7. **NATURE CENTRAL** – an initiative to inventory, document and promote the respectful enjoyment of rural protected areas within 100 km of Red Deer. Joey Temple and Myrna Pearman are the program supervisors, and we welcome Caitlyn Lawrence as the new Education and Program Coordinator.
8. **HABITAT STEWARD** – a program to recognize landowners who conserve habitat on their property.
9. **ADOPT-A-STREAM** – an initiative to encourage the citizens of Red Deer to protect our rivers and creeks. Stay tuned as this new program will soon be launched.
10. **The OWL AWARD** – given each year to someone who works hard on behalf of RDRN This year's recipient was Susan van der Hoek.
11. **RED DEER RIVER NATURALISTS ENDOWMENT FUND FOR NATURE** – we set this fund up with the RDDCF with the goal of creating an endowment fund to help support nature-based projects in Central Alberta.

## NATURE CENTRAL AGM REPORT: By JOEY TEMPLE

RDRN secured a CIP grant from the Alberta Government for Nature Central in March 2022. This grant covered the wages for two positions: the Education and Program Coordinator (EPC) and the Naturalist-In-Residence (NIR) for two years. The grant also covered other project expenditures.

We hired the EPC and NIR positions starting May 1, 2022. These positions were filled by Graeme Gissing (EPC) and Dr. Natalia Lifshitz (NIR). The EPC position consisted of 16 hours per week for 72 weeks. Unfortunately, Graeme moved on from the position after 18 weeks.

Several events were planned and executed through the late spring and summer. The events took place at several protected areas in the 100 km radius around the city of Red Deer, including interpretive hikes, a Family Nature Night at KWNC, pond dipping, paddling and a family event "Biologist for the

Day." Graeme also worked on reformatting the Nature Central website ([naturecentral.org](http://naturecentral.org)) and updating content.

The NIR position consisted of 16 hours per week for 16 weeks. Natalia visited several of the protected areas within the 100 km radius that had not been inventoried by Shaye Hill and Myrna Pearman in 2021 and early 2022. Once the information was collected, she began to build a database, including floral and faunal inventories, photos and other pertinent information.

Natalia stepped into the EPC role until the end of the year. During this time, she continued to update the website, the database and photo files. At present, the database is for internal use only but we will be looking at ways to open it to the public.

Other projects undertaken included an ArcGIS Story Map, the Habitat Steward Program, Adopt-A-Stream and drone filming.

We contracted the Story Map, which is now live on the NC website, to a third party. We will be adding information from the data-

12. **EXTERNAL GRANTS** – we look forward to awarding grants of up to \$5,000 each and \$15,000 per year to organizations that match our goals and philosophy. Initial recipients of these grants for \$5,000 each is Alberta Lake Management Society and Red Deer Polytechnique. Wow – an impressive list!

We also continue to promote our earlier projects, such as the Birding Trail Guides for both the City of Red Deer and for Central Alberta, and we have such ongoing initiatives such as a \$1,500 annual scholarship to Red Deer Polytechnique.

RDRN is trying to increase our public profile in Red Deer. To this end, we updated all our logos (with a huge vote of thanks to Doug Pedersen), produced a beautiful new brochure, and we launched the process to update and revamp our website (spearheaded by Anto Davis). We have some RDRN clothing with our new logos. If you are interested, please contact me at [rdrn.nature@gmail.com](mailto:rdrn.nature@gmail.com).

You may have seen us at the Red Deer Rebels Game, and we also had a booth at the Best of Banff Mountain Film Festival.

In 2022, we let our voices and concerns be heard about various issues: Molly Bannister Drive; Cat Bylaw; City of Red Deer's proposed annexation of land west highway #2 (Spirit Creek Drainage); Waskasoo Redevelopment Plan; Gravel Extraction.

I encourage everyone to let their voices be heard on matters related to the environment, and we welcome anyone who wants to join the board or help on committees. Please contact us if you are interested.

Also, I would like to thank the members who support and donate to RDRN.

Finally, thank you, thank you, thank you, to all our dedicated Board members and super volunteers who keep RDRN on track and spend countless hours keeping the society running smoothly. We could not function without you!!!



base and we are looking at getting our own ArcGIS license.

The Habitat Steward program was another project under the Nature Central umbrella. A total of 27 farms/acreages have joined the program.

The Adopt-a-Stream program is well underway, though we are waiting for the maps to be printed, as unfortunately there has been a delay due to a shortage of paper supplies. Stay tuned to the website for availability in the new year.

Drone footage vignettes: we have several snippets ready to add to the Story Map.

On January 1, 2023 the EPC position was filled by Caitlyn Lawrence. Caitlyn has been busy working to secure more funding so we can offer a 32-hour per week NIR position starting May 1.

She will also be organizing events for the summer. Stay tuned for a list of these events and check out the website for updates!

## BIRD FOCUS: BY CHRIS OLSEN

The Bird Focus Group wrapped up their season on December 10th, just ahead of the Christmas Bird Count weekend. About 20 people were out for a walk in the Gaetz Lake Sanctuary, and then met for coffee and Christmas cake at KWNC. We used that opportunity for feedback and to gather ideas for next year. Some popular themes were our out-of-town trips, natural history discussions, and special events like winter owling, spring grouse

watch, dawn chorus outings and migration staging sites.

In 2022, we ran weekly outings from late March until mid-December, for a total of 37 outings that included 359 participants. We used eBird to report our observations and saw 128 bird species. We'll start our spring schedule again in March this year and so watch the RDRN website 'Coming Events' calendar for weekly destinations and join us when you can! Meanwhile, remember to share your photos and bird observations on RDRN social media.

## IN THE ALBERTA WILDERNESS! BY DON AUTEN

The Red-backed Vole is one of our most common voles. Based on hundreds of trail cam photos that



I have checked, they are active both day and night, but are about 60% nocturnal. Their preferred habitat is within forested areas; they don't like open areas such as fields or plains. Because they are such tasty morsels for coyotes, owls and weasels, they seldom expose themselves. Rather, they prefer to stay hidden under the grasses and leaf litter in the summer and under the snow in the winter. They have a short life, seldom living longer than a year, but in that time they will have multiple litters of up to six young per litter.

## DID YOU KNOW: BY SUSAN VAN DER HOEK

A group of Pronghorn (*Antilocapra americana*) are called a band, pack, or herd. Pronghorn are a species of artiodactyl (even-toed, hoofed) mammals indigenous to the western mixed and short-grass prairies of Alberta and Saskatchewan south to Sonora, Baja California in Mexico. They were once found as far east as the edge of the tall-grass prairie in Manitoba. Although not an antelope, they are known colloquially as the American Antelope, Prong Buck, Pronghorn Antelope and Prairie Antelope. The Pronghorn, the last wide-ranging native mammal on the North American prairies, is found nowhere else in the world. Standing almost 1 m tall at the shoulders, it is the fastest land mammal in North America, reaching speeds of up to 92 km/hr. In fact, the Pronghorn is the second-fastest mammal in the world, after the cheetah. The pronghorn may have evolved its running ability to escape from now-extinct predators such as the American Cheetah, since its speed greatly exceeds that of any living North American predators. Pronghorns graze on grasses, forbs, sagebrush, cacti and other small prairie plants. They mate in late summer and early fall and the females give birth to one or two fawns the following spring. When the fawns are born, they are almost odourless in order to protect them from predators. At about a week old, fawns join the band.

**2022 CBC Count Participants:** Colleen Anderson, Phillip Anderson, April Aspden, Lorraine Bannister, Bill Barritt, Karin Bjorge, Myron Bjorge, Ron Bjorge, Judy Boyd, Ryan Boyd, Vicky Bratton, Carolyn Bryant, Wade Bryant, Lois Burkinshaw, Phil Burkinshaw, Colleen Caddy, Jerry Caddy, John Caddy, Ed Cameron, Sandra Cameron, Dave Dewald, Judy F., Sharon Faszer, Marie Fletcher, Eileen Ford, Maria Ford, Morris Flewwelling, Marie Flexhaug, Mary Flexhaug, Estelle Froese, Ngaere Gill, John Goulet, Shelley-Anne Goulet, Gordon Graham, Sharon Graham, Doug Hamilton, Shaye Hill, Don Ironside, Marlene Ironside, Roy Jamieson, Carol Kelly, Grant Kelly, Sharron Kirby, Tim Kirby, Linda Kullman, Andrea Lash, Brianna Layden, Tom Layden, Jim Leslie, Claudia Lipski, Ron MacDonald, Vi MacDonald, Kent MacFarlane, Gwen Marshall, Tim McJunkin, Mike McNaughton, Mark Meunier, Ruby Meunier, Richelle Miller, Dorothy Murray, Chester Payne, Myrna Pearman, Doug Pedersen, Elsie Peterson, Marie Pijean, Cindy Piriard, Darlene Reimche, Anna Robertson, Jim Robertson, Heather Saunders, Harley Siebold, Kim Siebold, Harvey Sutherland, Sandra Sutherland, Rick Tallas, Bev Thompson, Betty Volker, Gordy Waddy, Pauline Wigg, Robert Wigg, Doreen Wingert, Kevin Wingert.

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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**FLOWER  
FOCUS  
WITH  
DON WALES**

**SEE YOU IN  
MARCH!**



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