

The Red Deer River Naturalist



March 2023

Editors: Myrna Pearman & Susan van der Hoek

RDP Bio Science Students Present Fascinating Wildlife Ecology Findings

- Use of Remote Sensing to monitor Winter Tick Infestation of Moose
- Urban Ungulate Population Survey via Unmanned Aerial Vehicle
- Ground Beetles Barcoding and Genetic Sequencing
- Fungal and Oomycetes Communities Associated with White Spruce and Trembling Aspen
- Nightly Trends of Local Bat Populations using Acoustic Monitoring

▶ 23

MARCH
2023

7:00 PM
KERRY WOOD
NATURE
CENTRE
RED DEER



Jason Headley



Nature Edmonton



An enthusiastic group of students in the Biological Science Degree program, many interested in pursuing a future in wildlife ecology. All involved in research projects at **Red Deer Polytechnic**.



From left to right Jaden Griffiths, Payton Baltzer, Alicia Irwin, Jennine Baughman, Kira Weddell and Terese McNabb



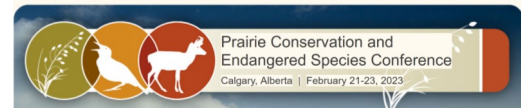
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All photos, unless indicated, were provided by Red Deer Polytechnic

All are Welcome

PRAIRIE CONSERVATION AND ENDANGERED SPECIES CONFERENCE



By Myrna Pearman

The 13th Prairie Conservation and Endangered Species Conference (PCESC) was held in Calgary on February 21-23, 2023. The conference rotates between the three prairie provinces every three years, with 2013 being the last time it was held in Alberta (in Red Deer!).

The theme of this year's conference, which was held at the Calgary Zoo, was "Prairie Collaboration, Connection and Conservation." An Art Show and several pre-conference presentations preceded the formal conference, which combined plenary sessions with various break-out sessions covering a myriad of topics.

The Calgary Zoo Wilder Institute staff opened the conference with a plenary session describing the role of the conservation breeding and release programs for at-risk species (e.g., Greater Sage Grouse, Northern Leopard Frog, Burrowing Owl, Half-Moon Hairstreak). Other plenary sessions included Ord's Kangaroo Rat conservation through sand dune habitat restoration, restoring bison to the Blood Indian Reserve, and Canadian and Indigenous perspectives on the newly launched Grasslands Roadmap (<https://www.grasslandsroadmap.org>).

Concurrent sessions were only 20 minutes long, so it was a bit of a race to attend as many relevant sessions as possible, especially since it was very cold out and sessions were held in different zoo buildings. However, all presentations were diverse and interesting. Some of the sessions I attended included: the small grant program of the Alberta Native Plant Council; Burrowing Owl reintroduction efforts, approaches re: managing and assessing multiple species-at-risk, bat conservation efforts in the Milk River area, Operation Grassland Community efforts, "Why Ecological Restoration Projects Fail," Golden Eagle population dynamics, the role of wetlands in bumble bee conservation, integrating cultural and natural science for Purple Martin conservation, the role of fire on the prairie landscape, and promoting iNaturalist in Prince Alberta National Park.

In addition to the formal presentations, there was a poster session for organizations, agencies and researchers to share details about their activities and projects. Claudia Lipski and I were honoured to represent RDRN at the poster session, where we shared information about RDRN and our various programs and initiatives.

Not only was this conference interesting and informative, but it also provided a great opportunity for us to meet and network with other like-minded conservationists from across the Canadian prairies. I would like to thank RDRN for covering my conference expenses. RDRN donated a bird feeder and seeds while I donated copies of my books for a Silent Auction basket. The next conference is scheduled for 2026 in Saskatchewan.



Board Notes

By Rick Tallas, President

First, I would like to thank our very dedicated board members: Anto Davis, Bob Kruchten (Treasurer), Daryl Beck (Secretary), Don Wales (Past President) Ed Graff (Just joined the board, a special thanks) and Myrna Pearman (our new VP). We also thank Dean Baayens and Joey Temple for their service to RDRN as board members. We have hired Rod Trentham as our new Recording Secretary. Caitlyn Lawrence is our Education and Program Coordinator.

I am a buzzing from our February speaker, Charity Briere, and her engaging presentation on urban bees. We had a great turnout of 60 people! To learn more about native bees, visit the Alberta Native Bee Council's website: <https://www.albertanativebeecouncil.ca>.

Our Communications Committee (Anto Davis, Susan van der Hoek, Myrna Pearman) has been working hard on our new website. We hope to launch it by the end of March.

As February draws to a close, it is nice that the days are getting longer. I look forward to the arrival of spring birds. We have had sightings of American Robins!

RDRN Social Media:

793 Facebook Members

310 Twitter Followers

405 Instagram Followers

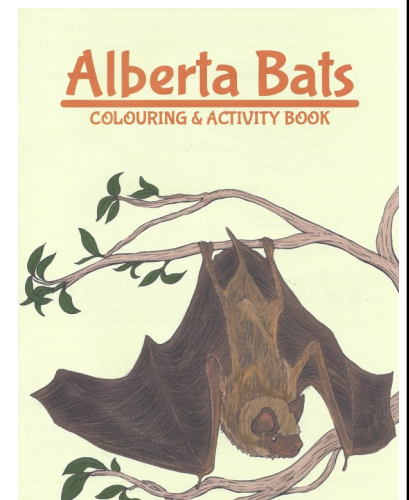
RDRN EXTERNAL GRANT PROGRAM

The RDRN has set up an External Grant Program to support local conservation and research initiatives which support the goals and objectives of the society. To date, three grants have been awarded:

The Alberta Community Bat Program received funding to reprint their very informative and popular *Alberta Bats Colouring and Activity Book*.

Red Deer Polytechnic received funding to study wildlife occupancy, connectivity and movement around the City of Red Deer, to promote human-wildlife coexistence in this region.

The Alberta Lake Management Society received funding to support their 28th annual conference, which will be held in September, in Sylvan Lake.



IN THE ALBERTA WILDERNESS! BY DON AUTEN

The wolf population in Alberta is very healthy and I am lucky to get pictures of them quite often on my trail cameras. It's interesting to note that wolves come in many different colors and combination of colors. There are very few of the standard grey color we picture in our minds when we think of them. In fact, about 55 % of Alberta's wolves are black and—because black is a dominant color genetically—that percentage is steadily increasing.

These wolves came by one of my camera traps last October. I have two cameras at that location and, based on the photos and video, there were at least ten in this pack. The initial video was triggered by an unknown animal running by and within seconds a wolf went screaming by. The rest of the pack showed up a few moments later.

A pack this size will need two or three deer per week to stay healthy. I'm pretty sure this was a hunt in progress.



BIRD FOCUS: BY CHRIS OLSEN

After our winter break, we'll return to weekly outings again in mid-March. Per discussion at our fall wrap-up, we'll be traveling more widely and exploring some new sites in the Central Parkland and beyond. The start of this new season takes us to some open waters with a Bow River excursion.

Other new activities will include a Sharp-tailed Grouse Watch, Snow Goose Festival, owl banding and a multi-day boreal birding tour. As always, outings start at 10:00 AM unless otherwise noted. Directions, maps and details are posted on the Calendar of Events on the RDRN website. Be sure to check the calendar for schedule changes or destination updates. We're an inclusive group that learns from each other, and birders of all skill levels are welcome!

2023 Spring Schedule

- March 18—Carburn Park, Calgary – meet in the main parking lot
March 25—Riverbend Park perimeter trail – meet in the main parking lot
April 1—McKenzie Trails Park – meet in the main parking lot
April 8—Gaetz Lakes Sanctuary – meet at KWNC

NATURE CENTRAL OUTING: We are launching the 2023 Nature Central (NC) season with a hike/snowshoe (depending on snow conditions) at the Lockerby Conservation Site, northwest of Pine Lake, on **Saturday March 11 @ 11:AM**. Watch for further information on RDRN and NC social media or contact Caitlyn at epc.rdrn.nature@gmail.com.

Details about the site can be found at:

<https://www.albertadiscoverguide.com/site.cfm?grid=E3&number=161>

NATURE CENTRAL



FLOWER FOCUS WITH DON WALES

March 15—Kerry Wood Nature Centre—10:00 AM
The Wildflowers of Grassland National Park,
Saskatchewan

Photo by Don Wales



DID YOU KNOW: BY SUSAN VAN DER HOEK

A group of sparrows are called a host, quarrel, knot, flutter, crew or ubiquity. The common House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) is the most familiar sparrow in the world, it is found on every continent except Antarctica. Its invasive nature often gives the word "sparrow" an unpleasant and unwelcome association. In North America and South America, the New World Sparrows are members of the *Emberizidae* bird family. Fortunately, there are many beautiful native sparrows and in Alberta we have 27 species of sparrows plus the House Sparrow. Sparrows are generally granivorous and eat a wide variety of seeds and grain. Seed-bearing flowers and grasses are natural food sources. However, some sparrows also eat insects. Sparrows can be skittish and will quickly retreat to dense shelter if they feel threatened or startled. Sparrows are often described as 'little brown jobs' by birders so it is obvious that it can be a challenge for even an experienced birder to recognize them. White-throated Sparrows sing a high-pitched whistle that is easy to learn. Just listen for "Oh-sweet-Canada-Canada." Look for these sparrows in the woods on the forest edge during the breeding season.



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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