

The Red Deer River Naturalist



November 2023

Editors: Myrna Pearman & Susan van der Hoek



SOIL CHARACTERISTICS IN THE CONTEXT OF LAND RECLAMATION



▶ **23**
NOVEMBER
2023

7:00 PM

**KERRY WOOD
NATURE CENTRE
RED DEER**
REFRESHMENTS SERVED



Lisa Verbisky has a Master's of Science degree from the University of Alberta. She has worked on major projects including a salmon survey in northern Quebec, a project investigating biodiversity of pre- and post-harvest sites on Alberta Pacific's forestry management area, and a chronosequence comparing diversity of fire versus harvest disturbed stands in northwestern Alberta. Although her primary focus has been landscape ecology, she developed a passion for soils while living and working in the Peace Region in Northern BC. The extensive oil and gas development in this region demanded a strong working knowledge of soil characteristics for effective pre- and post-site assessments. As the instructor of a land reclamation diploma, Lisa developed her knowledge in this field to pass this skill on to her students. Lisa is the Associate Dean at the Donald School of Business, Science and Technology (RDP).

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ALL ARE WELCOME

MAY SPECIES COUNT OF SPRING-FLOWERING PLANTS: EILEEN FORD

The May Species Count is conducted during the last full weekend of May each year. In the case of flora, we note the bloom stage of each species according to the following scale: (Reproductive–R) 0–without blossom bud; 1–blossom buds recognizable; 2–blossom buds strongly swollen; 3–shortly before flowering; 4–beginning bloom; 5–up to 25% in blossom; 6–up to 50% in blossom; 7–full bloom; 8–fading; 9–completely faded; 10–yielding fruit.

The May Plant Count is a Citizen Science project undertaken by volunteers. Besides collecting data for general interest, the count information is submitted to the ACIMS (Alberta Conservation Information Management System) and becomes part of a larger database that is accessed for phenological studies. The chart included here is from May 31 at Grassy Lake, also known as the Bend, near Pine Lake on Hwy 42. Visit www.albertadiscoverguide.com for more info on this property. It is representative of the flowering plants that can be found on numerous public and private lands that are surveyed each year in central Alberta (but it is not an exhaustive list of all flowering plants in bloom on that date across the region). If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to contact Eileen at hh3@telusplanet.net. Thank you to Susan van der Hoek for typing up the fieldnotes into a spreadsheet.

| | | | | | |
|---------------------------------|------------------------|-----|--------------------------------|------------------------------|----|
| AMARYLLIDACEAE | Amaryllis Family | | APIACEAE | Carrot Family | |
| <i>Allium textile</i> | Prairie onion | R6 | <i>Zizia aptera</i> | Heart-leaved alexanders | R4 |
| SANTALACEAE | Sandalwood family | | CORNACEAE | Dogwood Family | |
| <i>Comandra umbellata</i> | Pale comandra | R6 | <i>Cornus stolonifera</i> | Red-osier dogwood | R7 |
| CARYOPHYLLACEAE | Pink Family | | PRIMULACEAE | Primrose Family | |
| <i>Cerastium arvense</i> | Mouse-ear chickweed | R7 | <i>Primula pauciflora</i> | Saline shooting star | R8 |
| RANUNCULACEAE | Buttercup Family | | ASTERACEAE | Aster Family | |
| <i>Ranunculus cardiophyllus</i> | Heart-leaved buttercup | R7 | <i>Antennaria parviflora</i> | Small-leaf pussytoes | R7 |
| <i>Thalictrum venulosum</i> | Veiny meadow rue | R7 | <i>Erigeron philadelphicus</i> | Philadelphia fleabane | R6 |
| BRASSICACEAE | Mustard family | | <i>Petasites sagittatus</i> | Arrow-leaved colt's-foot | R8 |
| <i>Thlaspi arvense</i> | Stinkweed | R6 | <i>Taraxacum officinale</i> | Common dandelion | R7 |
| GROSSULARIACEAE | Gooseberry Family | | <i>Tragopogon dubius</i> | Yellow goat's beard | R7 |
| <i>Ribes oxycanthoides</i> | Northern gooseberry | R10 | PLANTAGINACEAE | Plantain Family | |
| <i>Ribes triste</i> | Swamp red currant | R8 | <i>Penstemon procerus</i> | Small-flowered beardtongue | R7 |
| ROSACEAE | Rose Family | | RUBIACEAE | Bedstraw Family | |
| <i>Amelanchier alnifolia</i> | Saskatoon | R10 | <i>Galium boreale</i> | Northern bedstraw | R5 |
| <i>Geum triflorum</i> | Three-flowered avens | R7 | GENTIANACEAE | Gentian Family | |
| <i>Rosa acicularis</i> | Prickly rose | R5 | <i>Gentiana fremontii</i> | Marsh gentian | R7 |
| <i>Rosa woodsii</i> | Common wild rose | R7 | CAPRIFOLIACEAE | Honeysuckle Family | |
| FABACEAE | Legume Family | | <i>Lonicera dioica</i> | Twining honeysuckle | R5 |
| <i>Astragalus agrestis</i> | Field milk vetch | R7 | JUNCACEAE | Rush Family | |
| <i>Lathyrus ochroleucus</i> | Creamy vetchling | R8 | <i>Juncus balticus</i> | Baltic sedge | R8 |
| <i>Thermopsis rhombifolia</i> | Golden-bean | R8 | JUNCAGINACEAE | Arrowgrass Family | |
| <i>Vicia americana</i> | American vetch | R7 | <i>Triglochin maritima</i> | Seaside arrowgrass | R7 |
| GERANIACEAE | Geranium family | | ASPARAGACEAE | Asparagus Family | |
| <i>Geranium viscosissimum</i> | Sticky purple geranium | R6 | <i>Maianthemum stellatum</i> | Star-flowered solomon's-seal | R7 |
| VIOLACEAE | Violet Family | | | | |
| <i>Viola adunca</i> | Early blue violet | R8 | | | |
| <i>Viola canadensis</i> | Canada violet | R7 | | | |
| <i>Viola nephrophylla</i> | Bog violet | R7 | | | |
| ELAEAGNACEAE | Oleaster Family | | | | |
| <i>Shepherdia canadensis</i> | Canada buffaloberry | R10 | | | |



MOTUS PROJECT BY MYRNA

PEARMAN Each fall, we watch and listen for migrating Northern Saw-whet Owls here at Sylvan Lake. We don't hear the owls themselves, but we listen for flocks of agitated chickadees and nuthatches, which alert us to their presence as they try to sleep the day away in our spruce trees. We are always delighted to see them and, if the branches aren't too thick, try to take a few pictures before letting them return to their slumber.

I am excited to share that—thanks to new technology and the generosity and technical genius of Mark and Joanne Cundict—I have had the recent honour to be involved in a research project involving the migration tracking of these little owls.



Mark and Joanne have installed a MOTUS station on our property. MOTUS is an international collaborative research network that uses coordinated automated radio telemetry to track migrating animals. Special nanotags are affixed to target animals and strategically placed stations, which include specialized receivers and sophisticated software, detect the radio signals emitted by the tags when the animals pass by. Under ideal conditions, migrating birds bearing nanotags can be detected within a 15-km radius of a station.

Mark and Joanne designed, assembled and installed my system, which went live in May. Interestingly, they have since installed stations at their home in Red Deer and at Pigeon Lake.

We have waited expectantly since May for a "hit." Finally, success! On October 4th, two Northern Saw-whet Owls – who'd each received their tags ("deployed") by Dr. Geoff Holroyd and his team at the Beaverhill Bird Observatory east of Edmonton – passed through. One had been deployed on September 22; the other on September 28.

Interestingly, they both passed through on the same evening. One flew by without stopping at around 8:55 PM while the other one arrived just before midnight and hung around the area for about 10 minutes.

Check out the MOTUS website to find out more about this remarkable technology: motus.org.



Bottom photo courtesy of BBO

YELLOW-THROATED WARBLER! A Yellow-throated Warbler has been causing quite a stir amongst Alberta birders. It has been seen hanging around a farmyard east of Breton since Sunday, October 22. This is the third record for the species in Alberta, which is normally restricted to the southeast regions of the US. As of October 30th, it was healthy and lively, eating berries and picking at sunflower chips.



NATURE ALBERTA: Nature Alberta (NA) is a provincial organization dedicated to increasing nature appreciation and conservation in Alberta. Through a variety of outreach programs, NA encourages Albertans to learn about nature, experience nature and protect nature. They also oversee the Alberta Nature Network, composed of over 45 nature clubs located across the province.

The Nature Alberta website is a comprehensive, one-stop resource filled with club news as well as information on upcoming events and speakers. Their online newsletters and excellent monthly magazines are also available at naturealberta.ca

RDRN Social Media:

1075 Facebook Members

313 X Followers

440 Instagram Followers



IN THE ALBERTA WILDERNESS! BY DON AUTEN

One of the seldom-seen members of the weasel family is the Fisher. These mammals traditionally live in the boreal forest but in the last few years they are expanding their range into agricultural areas. Fishers are adapting well to living closer to people. They are one of the larger members of the weasel family. The males can grow to almost 1.2 m (4 ft.) in length, almost half of which is the tail.

I set up a trail camera on a well-used ridgetop game trail in the west country and soon discovered that at least two different fishers were regularly traveling on that trail. They come by about every three weeks.

All members of the weasel family move quickly, seldom slowing down long enough for the trail cam to capture a good photo. This photo is of a young Fisher, probably one of my best so far. I'm still trying!



DID YOU KNOW: BY SUSAN VAN DER HOEK

A group of lizards is called a “lounge.” The Greater Short-horned Lizard (*Phrynosoma hernandesi*) is the only lizard species found in Alberta and Saskatchewan (and then in only four general areas in the southern parts of each province). It is sometimes called the “horned toad” because of its squat appearance, although it’s not a toad at all.



This small lizard is usually less than 10 cm in length, with a flat body and short legs. It can be reddish-brown, beige, tan or gray in colour, with dark spots along its back. A striking feature is the row of small spines along the back rim of its head. It also has small spines along the side of its body. When threatened, it can inflate its body to appear larger and bristlier. Its coloration, along with the ability to stay very still, allows it to blend in with its environment, enabling it to ambush prey and avoid predators. They forage on a variety of invertebrates, especially ants, beetles and grasshoppers. Predators include coyotes, raptors, corvids and snakes. They are usually active between April and September. During the day, they shuttle between sun and shade to thermoregulate. Unlike most lizards, which lay eggs, they give birth to up to 15 live young that quickly become independent.

Greater Short-horned Lizards, which are found throughout western North America, from Mexico to southern Alberta and Saskatchewan, are limited to rugged, sparsely vegetated slopes found between upland grasslands and coulee bottoms. The species also requires crumbly, well-drained soils into which they dig their night-time and winter burrows. The Greater Short-horned Lizard was designated endangered in Canada in 2007 due to ongoing threats and because of its small and fragmented distribution in Canada.

FLOWER FOCUS

WITH DON WALES

FALL FLOWERS OF THE SCOTTISH HIGHLANDS

Wednesday, November 15

10:00 AM—Kerry Wood Nature Centre

NOTE: I am hoping to find someone to take on the role of leading Flower Focus. Please contact me if you are interested.

Board Notes

By Rick Tallas, President

- Typical weather! One day it is nice, the next day we have six inches of snow. A sudden awakening to winter. On the upside, there is no more yard work and there is more time to relax.
- We had a great turnout October 26 for our two speakers, Dr. Margo Pybus and Mark Cundict. They were both excellent!
- As we try and make sense in all the events happening in the world, I am very grateful to be living in Canada. RDRN offers excellent programs and I would like to encourage everyone to focus on the organizations that are trying to make a positive impact.

BUFFALO LAKE NATURE CLUB MEETING

Thursday November 16—7:00 PM—St. George’s Anglican Church (4817-51 St., Stettler)

ARE WE AT WAR WITH WILDLIFE?

KAREN FARLANDER

BIRD FOCUS WITH CHRIS OLSEN

Outings start at 10:00 AM unless otherwise noted. Trip schedule details and updates are posted on the RDRN website. Birders of all skill levels are welcome! **Navigation:** Use the Alberta Discover Guide (app or free magazine), the Birding Trails Alberta website or your favourite mapping app. Call Chris (780-581-4430) if you have questions or potential medical issues. Participants are encouraged to carpool, but you are responsible for your own arrangements. **Safety:** Wear sturdy, water resistant hiking footwear. Some trails are on rough or steep terrain. Dress appropriately, and carry water and a snack.

Nov 11 – Bower Woods – meet on the street across from 37 Selkirk Blvd

Nov 18 – Barrett Park to Gaetz Park – meet at Rotary Picnic Park, main parking lot

Nov 25 – McKenzie Trails – meet in the main parking lot

Dec 2 – Riverbend Perimeter Trail – meet in the main parking lot

Dec 9 – Gaetz Lake and wind-up – meet at Kerry Wood Nature Centre



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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