

# The Red Deer River Naturalist



January 2024

Editors: Myrna Pearman & Susan van der Hoek

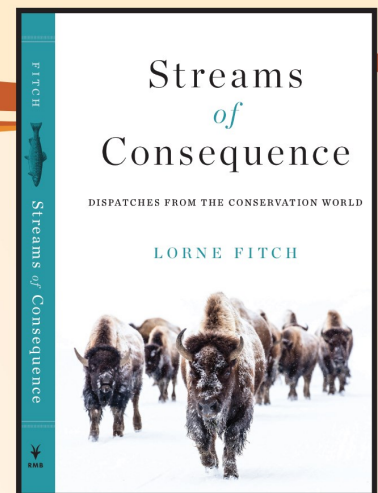


# 25

# January 2024

## Red Deer River Naturalists

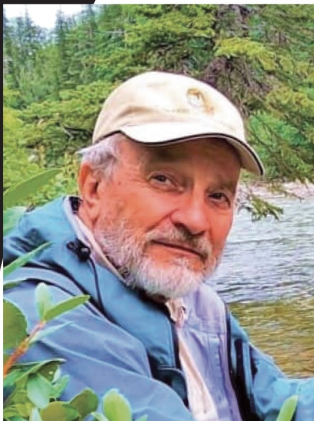
*Annual General Meeting followed by a wine and cheese social with Guest Speaker Lorne Fitch introducing his new book Streams of Consequence*



**KERRY WOOD  
NATURE  
CENTRE  
RED DEER**

*Streams of Consequence* weaves together a bit of "ecology for dummies," a cross-section of stories and essays on Alberta's biodiversity riches and treasured landscapes, and a backdrop of selections on conservation issues. These are stories of the land and of Alberta's plants, fish and wildlife told through the voice of a biologist with decades of experience on the front lines of conservation efforts. Through stories, metaphor and allegory, basic ecological principles are made clear, ecosystems are described and our human role in stewarding these natural treasures is revealed.

**6:30 - 7:00pm Annual General Meeting  
7:00 - 7:45pm Wine and Cheese Social  
7:45 - 8:45pm Lorne Fitch Presentation**



Lorne Fitch

Lorne Fitch is a professional biologist, a retired provincial fish and wildlife scientist and a former adjunct professor at the University of Calgary. He is also the co-founder of a very successful riparian stewardship initiative called Cows and Fish. He has been widely recognized for his conservation efforts.

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**All are Welcome**

Only Members can Vote

# Board Notes

**Rick Tallas, President**

- Wow 2024 has arrived, as the days slowly get longer, I am looking forward to RDRN continuing to offer our programs. They include our monthly meetings featuring excellent speakers, our Focus Groups (Bird, Flower), Central Alberta Birding Trails, Red Deer Birding Trails, Nature Central, Habitat Steward, Christmas and May Species counts, our scholarship program and our grant program.
- Please view our outstanding websites: [www.rdrn.ca](http://www.rdrn.ca), [www.birdingtrailsalberta.com](http://www.birdingtrailsalberta.com) and [www.naturecentral.org](http://www.naturecentral.org). Also join our RDRN social media: Facebook, Instagram and X.
- We thank Judy Boyd again for her many years of coordinating our May Species Count and Christmas Bird Counts. We welcome Shelley-anne and John Goulet as our new bird count coordinators!
- I look forward to the *Adopt-a-Stream* program being officially announced, in conjunction with the City of Red Deer and Kerry Wood Nature Centre.
- I would like to extend my deepest appreciation to our volunteers and all of our members who support us through membership renewals, donations and by attending our monthly meetings.
- A big shout out to our Board of Directors.
- Please email us if you are interested in volunteering or joining the board. (rdrn.nature @[gmail.com](mailto:rdrn.nature@gmail.com))
- Happy 2024 to everyone!

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

A group of gulls is called a squabble, colony or flock. There is no specific bird called a seagull and it is interesting that we call them thus in landlocked Alberta. Gulls are a diverse family of birds with different habitats, ranges and colour patterns. There are ten species of gulls and terns in Alberta. Gulls have hooked beaks and terns beaks are straight. Terns have webbed feet.

**Herring Gull** (*Larus argentatus*)—occupies farmland, bays, beaches, lakes, piers and landfills.

**Ring-Billed Gull** (*Larus delawarensis*)—occupies inland locations, piers, large bodies of water, landfills, adapted to human-disturbed areas, common in cities and parking lots.

**California Gull** (*Larus californicus*)—occupies lakes, cities, farms, plowed fields, follows farming equipment.

**Franklin's Gull** (*Leucophaeus pipixcan*)—occupies fields, prairies, flooded pastures, marshes, lakes and follows farming equipment.

**Bonaparte's Gull** (*Chroicocephalus philadelphia*)—occupies bays, lakes, rivers, sloughs and sewage lagoons.

**Short-billed Gull** (*Larus brachyrhynchus*)—occupies shoreline of lakes and rivers, wet fields, pastures, landfills and sewage lagoons.

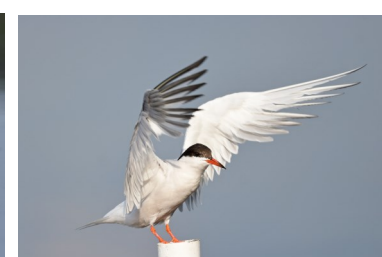
**Black Tern** (*Chlidonias niger*)—occupies wetlands with extensive vegetation and open water, river edges, lakes, marshes, sewage lagoons and beaches.

**Common Tern** (*Sterna hirundo*)—occupies aquatic habitats, lakes, bays and beaches.

**Forster's Tern** (*Sterna forsteri*)—Occupies lakes, marshes and wetlands.

**Caspian Tern** (*Hydroprogne caspia*) Occupies rivers and lakes.

*Left, from top: Herring Gull (left), Ring-billed Gull, California Gull Franklin's Gull, Bonaparte's Gull; Right, bottom three: Black Tern, Forster's Tern, Common Tern*





# IN THE ALBERTA WILDERNESS! BY DON AUTEN

The cougar population in Alberta has been increasing for the last few years. Although they are most common in the boreal forest in western and northern Alberta, they have been expanding their range and are now found across the province. They are adapting well to living near people and that results in more human/cougar contacts.

Because of this increasing contact, it is important to understand how humans and cougars can successfully co-exist. In Alberta, to learn more about cougar ranges and behaviors, a cougar study has been ongoing for several years.

About 100 cougars have been captured and equipped with GPS collars and their activities are being remotely monitored.

This trail cam photo is the first of three collared cougars I have captured over the last few years. I shared this photo and time/location with the Biologist who is involved in this study and from her data she was able to determine that this is Cougar #99. This female had two kittens when they collared her, and they were able to collar one of the kittens as well. Reviewing her data, she could also see that the collared kitten was with the female at this location. My camera also caught a photo of a kitten without a collar, so the biologist knew that the cougar family was still intact and doing well.



## AGM WITH A FLAIR!

We look forward to hosting a large crowd at our January 25th meeting. The AGM will start at 6:30 PM and be over by 7:00 PM. We encourage members to attend the AGM, but will also welcome everyone at 7:00 PM for a wine and cheese reception for Lorne Fitch. Lorne will sign books and give a short presentation. His presentation will be followed by a Q and A session as well as more refreshments! We hope to see you there!

### CBC 2023 Summary: From The Red Deer Advocate: December 29, 2023 (by Lana Michelin)

Geese a plenty were found in this year's Christmas Bird Count. With warm temperatures and open water available all around central Alberta, some 1,557 Canada geese were counted in the region this month. This falls just short of the record number of geese counted in December of 2017 — some 1,971.

But it's a huge difference from the zero geese spotted in the -30 C weather during last December's bird count.

Count organizer Judy Boyd, of the Red Deer River Naturalists, believes the unusually mild conditions so far this winter mean there was no real reason for geese to fly south.

Migration takes a heavy toll on them, she added. "They have to stop to feed, to fatten up, and then keep going. Think of how far some birds have to fly — to the Gulf of Mexico."

In between, they must navigate many hazards, including hunters and predators, greater exposure to avian flu, and large cities with misleading artificial lights and tall glass buildings.

Boyd said a Toronto group goes around collecting the thousands of carcasses of birds killed flying into skyscrapers. Given these odds, staying put where there's enough food and water makes sense, she added.

Another oddity in this year's bird count — which was conducted by about 85 central Alberta volunteers on Dec. 25 — was the early return of some horned larks. Boyd said they are supposed to arrive in this area in January, but some have come a month early. She isn't sure whether the mild weather also played into this unusual behavior.

As well, the lack of giant flocks of redpolls, bohemian waxwings, and snow buntings were noticed. Usually several hundreds of these birds can be seen flying together in the winter months, said Boyd.

But during this year's bird count, some flocks spotted were as small as 25 to 35 birds. She feels this might just be an incidental observation on that particular day, since she's seen some larger flocks earlier in the season. However, ornithologists have recorded changes to some bird populations over the last few decades. Boyd read that many California juncos have stopped migrating out of that State and are instead nesting there, while barn swallows are inexplicably sticking around in Argentina. "Maybe it's climate change, I don't know..."

While no completely out-of-province birds were seen during this month's bird count, Boyd knows a few were reported earlier this season. A Harris's Sparrow was seen in central Alberta, even though it's supposed to nest in the Northwest Territories and head to the central U.S. for the winter. A killdeer was spotted at Riverbend — although this bird was supposed to now be in the southern U.S. and Gulf area. And an out-of-season American Kestrel was also seen.

But perhaps the strangest report was of a Eurasian eagle owl at someone's bird feeder. Boyd said she has no clue how this exotic bird could have blown so far off course as it normally travels between Siberia and Ethiopia.

The annual Christmas Bird Count is done to compile one of the world's largest sets of wildlife survey data. The results are used to assess population trends and the distribution of birds. Another bird count will be done in May.

# BIRD FOCUS GROUP WITH CHRIS OLSEN

## Acknowledgements:

- Thanks to an initiative from Bob Krutchen, we applied for a Red Deer Community Better Participation grant in the spring and were awarded a \$1,000.00 grant. We used those funds to purchase two pairs of Nikon 5 10 x 40, binoculars that new birders used on a number of our outings.
- Ron Bjorge hosted our Riverbend Upper Trails outing on June 3 and provided a species summary for the Ferry Point weekend outing. John and Shelley-anne Goulet hosted our Michael O'Brien Wetland outing on August 12.
- Susan van der Hoek provided route maps and trip descriptions for the RDRN website events calendar and posted our trip summaries and eBird reports on RDRN social media.

## 2023 Summary:

We started our Spring/Summer schedule Mar 19 th , with a trip to Carburn Park in Calgary, taking advantage of the diversity along the open waters of the Bow River. Between March 19 and December 9, we hosted 32 outings.

Notables this year included the Wainwright Sharp-tailed Grouse watch and the Tofield Snow Goose Festival. Longer trips included Carburn Park in March, Wainwright in April, Bigelow Reservoir and Open Creek in July, and Frank Lake in August. Unfortunately, our Dry Island trip was cancelled due to rain – we did Riverbend in lieu. Note that our summary numbers do not include the Wainwright trip, May species count or the Ferry Point weekend, although many Bird Focus Group regulars also participated in one or all of those. With the above exceptions then, our 32 outings traversed 152.3 km, and collectively 339 participants documented 138 bird species (an increase of 10 species over last year). All bird observations and tracks were recorded with eBird. Species 'hot spots' this year were Kuhn Park (49), Alix Lake (43) and Riverbend upper trails (38).



Photo by Lynette Braun

Thanks to everyone who joined us this year to date. Our Bird Focus Group email list includes about 80 people, and thanks to Susan's diligence you can always see our weekly summaries and eBird reports on social media. We remain an inclusive group that learns together. New participants are always welcome so join us when you can!



when you can!

**RDRN Social Media:**  
**1317 Facebook Members**  
**310 X Followers**  
**446 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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