

The Red Deer River Naturalist



March 2024

Editors: Myrna Pearman & Susan van der Hoek

Students from Red Deer Polytechnic will Present a Variety of Fascinating Research Topics, from Red Deer to Costa Rica

- Assessing the Impact of Nest Temperature and Rainfall on the Olive Ridley (*Lepidochelys olivacea*) Sea Turtle Hatching Success in San Miguel, Costa Rica
- Population Densities of Ghost Crabs (*Ocypode*) Along Olive Ridley Sea Turtle Nesting Areas as indicators of Predation Risk
- Decoding the Genetic Identity of Native Bees for Sustainable Ecosystem Management
- Is Nuclear Power a Sustainable Necessity?

Meghan Heistad, Meggie Mackenzie, Isaiah Johnson, Abbey Van Heuvel, Sanjana Sharma, Felix Beever, Isaiah Johanson, and Kayde McMullen are all students attending RDP in the Biological Science Degree Program. Hoping to be professional biologists, they begin their research careers with projects spanning three months to three weeks.

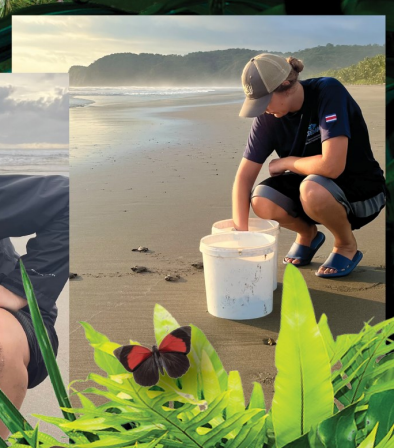
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March 2024

7:00 PM

KERRY WOOD
NATURE CENTRE
RED DEER

Alberta Bee Studies



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All are Welcome



ANOTHER MOTUS STORY

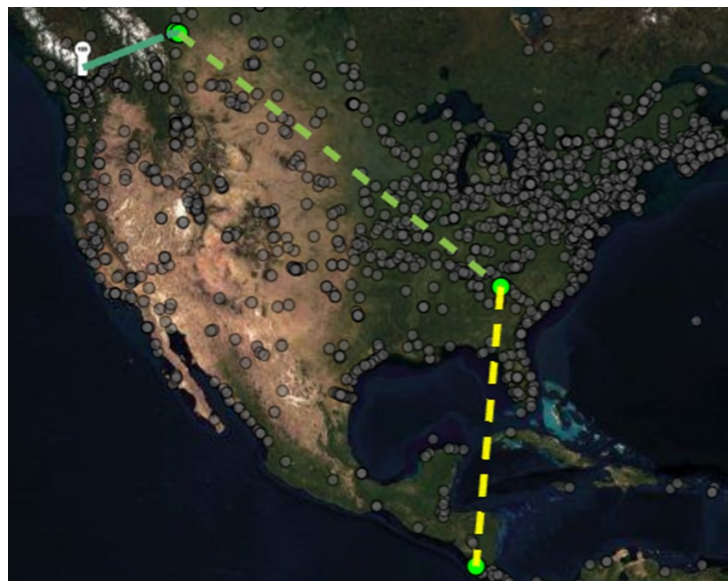
BY MARK CUNDICT AND MYRNA PEARMAN

A Motus receiver station was installed by Mark and Joanne Cundict near Myrna Pearman's residence at Sylvan Lake, AB in May, 2023. Mark and Joanne subsequently installed a tower at their residence in Red Deer. The first detections at the Sylvan Lake station were of two Northern Saw-whet Owls, both of which had been banded in late September at the Beaverhill Bird Observatory east of Edmonton. Both moved through the Sylvan Lake area on the evening of October 4, 2023.

A few weeks ago, Mark noticed that Motus had added another detection of interest to their public website. Both the Sylvan Lake and Red Deer receivers had picked up, in September, a Swainson's Thrush (SWTH). Motus detections are automatically uploaded if the bird remains within receiver range for at least three minutes. This particular thrush was detected for just under three minutes, so the detection was likely noticed by researchers reviewing their project data and then posted to the Motus site.

Swainson's Thrush (51769/80209) was banded on August 28, 2023 by the BC Interior Thrushes #280 project, a joint research project of the Canadian Wildlife Service and Texas A & M University. This team is deploying transmitters as part of their "Investigation of migratory tendencies of SWTH in a sub-species hybrid zone in the Interior of British Columbia." The exact tagging site was located at 50.220153, -122.884084, just off the Sea-to-Sky Highway near the Shadow Lake Interpretive Forest, north of Whistler, BC.

After getting its transmitter, the bird headed in a northeast direction, perhaps following river valleys, and passed by the



Sylvan Lake tower at 5:30 AM on the morning of September 13, having traveled 651 km. It continued eastward and was detected by the Cundict's tower in Red Deer a mere 20 minutes later, covering a distance of 27 km. It then headed southeast where it was detected on October 7 by a tower located at The Mountain Retreat and Learning Centre near Highlands, North Carolina, having traveled a distance of 3,075 km. The most exciting part of this story is that it then traveled south for an additional 2,700 km, arriving at Parc Nacional Santa Rosa, Costa Rica, on November 18, 2023!



FLOWER FOCUS WITH DON WALES



Wednesday, March 20

@ 10:00 AM

Kerry Wood Nature Centre

**Fall Wildflowers of Scotland's
West Highland Way**

Red Deer River Watershed Alliance Spring Forum in the Headwaters

Will be held on March 8, 2024 at the Sundre Legion from 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM. RDRWA members can attend for free while the cost for non-members is \$15.00 per person. There will be engaging presentations on groundwater, flood mapping, bull trout and more!

<https://rdrwa.ca/events/>

IN THE ALBERTA WILDERNESS! BY DON AUTEN

Over the past few days I have been seeing quite a few pairs of coyotes, so I chose one of my best coyote trail cam photos for this month's newsletter. The reason I've been seeing more coyotes lately? Mating season! Coyotes are monogamous and will mate for life, but every mating season there is still a lot of courtship that occurs. And the pairs get very active and expose themselves more than usual giving us the opportunity to see them.

About two months after mating, four to seven pups are born in an underground den that they dig just for this purpose. When the pups are still living in the den, Mom and Dad are kept very busy supplying them with food. At about six weeks old the pups leave the den and start travelling with their parents and the process of learning to hunt and learning the ways of their world begins!



BIRD FOCUS GROUP 2024 - SPRING SCHEDULE

After our winter break, we'll return to weekly outings again in the third week of March. Per discussion at our fall wrap-up, we'll be exploring some new sites in the Central Parkland and more widely. The start of this new season takes us to some open waters with a Bow River excursion. Other activities will include a Sharp-tailed Grouse Watch, Snow Goose Festival, owl banding, and some boreal birding and paddling experiences.

As always, outings start at 10:00 AM unless otherwise noted and usually finish up by about 1:00 PM. Directions, maps and travel details are posted on the RDRN website Calendar of Events. Be sure to check the website for schedule changes or destination updates. We're an inclusive group that learn from each other, and birders of all skill levels are welcome!

March 23 Carburn Park and Inglewood Bird Sanctuary, Calgary – meet in the main parking lot at Carburn Park

March 30 Riverbend Park perimeter trail – meet in the main parking lot

April 6 McKenzie Trails Park to Riverbend – meet in the main parking lot at Mackenzie (shuttle as required)

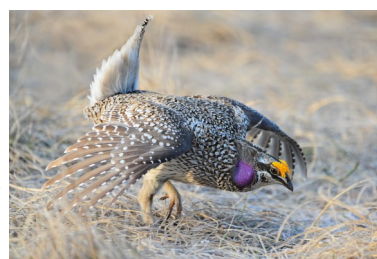
April 13 Gaetz Lakes Sanctuary – meet in the Nature Centre

April 20 Maskepetoon Park – meet in the fitness park parking lot (Kerry Wood Drive/Oak Drive)

April 27 Wainwright Sharp-tailed Grouse Watch – Advance registration required – call Chris to book

April 27-28 Tofield Snow Goose Festival – Advance registration required for tours – tofieldalberta.ca/events

NOTE: Sharp-tailed Grouse Trip: This outing will meet at a parking lot (tba) in Wainwright and depart for the lek at 4:00 AM sharp. Cost is \$35 per person. Plan to be in the blinds until about 8:00 AM, dressed in warm layers, and with a hot thermos and a snack. If you are unfamiliar with this spectacle, you will be amazed! Dancing at this very site was recently filmed and shown on the *Nature of Things*. Go to CBC GEM and search the *Nature of Things*; look for a three-part documentary titled the *Secret World of Sound*. The segment that includes Sharp-tailed Grouse on this lek is in Part Two (*Love and Rivals*).



Navigation: Use the *Alberta Discover Guide* (app or free magazine), the Birding Trails Alberta website, or your favorite mapping app. Participants are encouraged to carpool. **Safety:** Wear sturdy, water resistant hiking footwear. Carry ice cleats as required by the season. Some trails are on rough or steep terrain. Carry water and an energy snack. Wear layers and carry rain gear, a hat, insect repellent, sunscreen and bear spray as required by conditions. Contact Chris if there are any potential medical issues or if you have questions (780-581-4430).

DID YOU KNOW:

BY SUSAN VAN DER HOEK

A group of Woodchuck (*Marmota monax*) are called a “coterie.” The Woodchuck is a member of the squirrel family and is also known as a ground hog or whistle pig. It is closely related to other species of Alberta marmots, the Hoary and Yellow-bellied. While most marmots are highly social, Woodchucks are asocial (except during breeding and raising of the pups). They are found throughout Alberta in the boreal forest, parkland and foothill natural areas where wooded areas are broken by pastures and meadows.



They are usually grizzled brownish gray, but white (albino) and black (melanistic) individuals can occasionally be found. Their compact, chunky bodies are supported by short strong legs and their forefeet have long, curved claws that are well adapted for digging burrows. Despite their heavy-bodied appearance, Woodchucks are accomplished swimmers and climbers.

Mostly herbivorous, Woodchucks primarily eat wild grasses and other vegetation, berries and agricultural crops. Alfalfa, clover, and dandelions are preferred but they will also eat twigs, bark, leaves, grubs, grasshoppers, insects, snails, other small animals and birds' eggs.

Woodchucks are one of the few species that enter into true hibernation, and often build a separate "winter burrow" for this purpose. This burrow is usually in a wooded or brushy area and is dug below the frost line and remains at a stable temperature well above freezing during the winter months. The breeding season occurs in March and April, shortly after hibernation. A mated pair remains in the same den throughout the 28 to 32-day gestation period but the male leaves the den shortly before the young are born. One litter is produced annually, usually containing two to six blind, hairless and helpless young. Young Woodchucks are weaned and ready to seek their own dens at five to six weeks of age. In North America, they provide a unique cultural role as the focus of Groundhog Day, celebrated for a folk tradition foretelling the arrival of spring.



BUFFALO LAKE NATURE CLUB MONTHLY MEETING

Thursday, March 21 @ 7:00 PM

Lower Hall of St. George's Anglican Church on 4817- 51 Street in Stettler, AB.

Speaker: TBA (buffalolakenature.com)



SIDNEY STANSELL'S LOST LIST: *THE BIRDS OF ALBERTA*

Thanks to John Acorn and his students at the University of Alberta, the work of an early ornithologist has been discovered and is now available online for public viewing. During the early 1900s, very little was being written about the changing status of Alberta birds. Fortunately, a 1923 manuscript, *Birds of Alberta*, has recently come to light. The author, Sidney Stansell, was a schoolteacher, amateur ornithologist and bird appreciation advocate.

Mr. Stansell's observations, as well as the fascinating story of his efforts to document Alberta birds, has been posted on the Nature Alberta website. It is well worth the read! <https://naturealberta.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Stansells-Lost-List-Jan-2024.v2.pdf>.

We would like to thank Sydney Mohr for allowing us to reprint her excellent illustration, which accompanies the document.



NATURE CENTRAL UPDATE WITH CATHY STEELE

Exploring Kelly Ranches: Eleven participants joined our snowshoeing/winter walk at the Kelly Ranches conservation area on Feb 17. This property is approximately 20 minutes from Red Deer, located east on Hwy 42 and one km south of the Ghost Pine General Store.

Our walk took us through meadows, beaver ponds and boreal forest. There has been some selective logging in the past and grazing still occurs during parts of the year. Tamarack trees and labrador tea were a highlight. Some participants spotted white tailed deer and we saw signs of more deer and moose. Five blue jays chattered away and flew over the group twice!

Thanks to Tony, Jim and Steve for sharing information about the area and leading the way. We ended the walk with tailgate hot chocolate and homemade cookies! Permission is required to access this property, you can book online with Nature Conservancy of Canada. <https://connect2nature.ca>. There are several access points for this property. We drove east on Hwy 42, south on Range Rd 253 (for about .8km) and west on TWP Rd 364 and parked on the shoulder. There is a marked access on the south side of the road.

Check out more protected areas within 100kms of Red Deer at www.naturecentral.org. We post upcoming events on both the Nature Central and RDRN websites and Facebook pages.

NEXT OUTING: OPEN CREEK NATURAL AREA

Saturday, March 16—10:00 AM till 1:00 PM

Please register by emailing epc.rdrn.nature@gmail.com
<https://www.albertaparks.ca/parks/central/open-creek-na/>



Photos by Cathy Steele



RDRN Social Media:

1738 Facebook Members

311 X Followers

460 Instagram Followers

The Red Deer River Naturalists, the first natural history organization to be established in Alberta, traces its roots to the Northwest Entomological Society, founded in 1898. 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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