

The Red Deer River Naturalist



December 2024

Editors: Myrna Pearman & Susan van der Hoek



Central Alberta Annual

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Sunday
December 22
2024

Join other Central Alberta
Birdwatchers by participating in
the longest-running and most
important bird census in the world.

Contact Count Compilers, John or
Shelley-anne Goulet 403-392-1894
to sign up.

For more information and
instructions about the count go to
www.rdrn.ca

Sponsored by



Board Notes

Rick Tallas, President

It really seems like 2024 was a blur! Our monthly meetings/speaker's series is an important gathering and social time and we have enjoyed experts speaking on a variety of topics. 2024 was very successful as we continued to operate our programs and increased our giving to qualified organizations.

In 2025, RDRN will continue to:

- operate our programs
- comment on important issues in our community and province
- support local organizations and likeminded NGO's
- collaborate with other NGO's on as many issues as possible (strength in numbers)

A big shout out to our members, volunteers and board members who continue to support RDRN. Have a very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

BIRD FOCUS GROUP WITH CHRIS OLSEN

December 7 – Riverbend Perimeter Trail – meet in the main parking lot @ 10:00 AM

December 14 – Gaetz Lake and wind-up – meet at the Nature Centre @ 10:00 AM

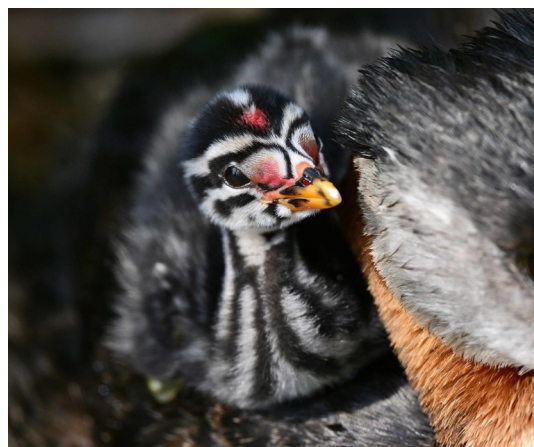
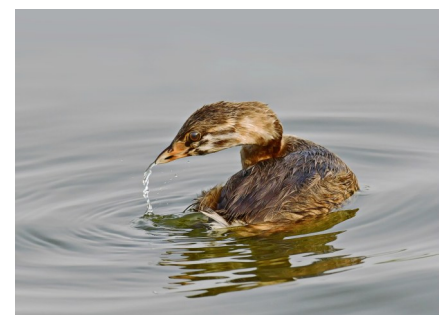
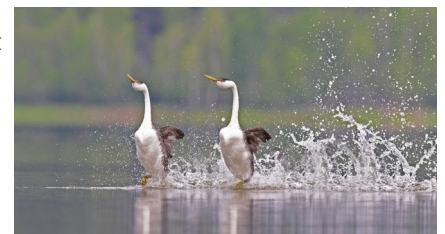
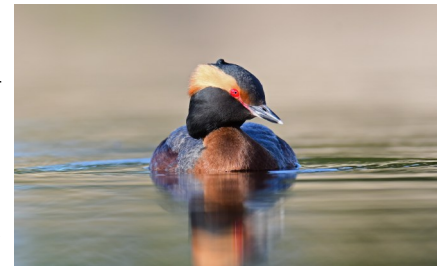


DID YOU KNOW? WITH SUSAN VAN DER HOEK

There are six species of Grebe found in Alberta (*images counter-clockwise from top right, no Clark's Grebe*) —Horned Grebe, Western Grebe, Pied-billed Grebe, Red-necked Grebe, Red-necked Grebe nestling, Eared Grebe. A group of grebes is called a “fleet.”

Grebes are medium to large-sized water birds with streamlined and elongated bodies. Their bodies are built for life on the water, featuring a long neck, slender bill and a relatively short tail. Grebes have pointed and dagger-like bills, adapted for catching aquatic prey. Bill shapes vary between species, ranging from straight to slightly upturned. Facial features include red or orange eyes and unique facial patterns (stripes, spots or distinctive markings).

Grebe legs are positioned far back on their bodies, near the tail, which makes them well-adapted for efficient swimming but makes it almost impossible for them to walk on land. Grebes have lobed toes, a unique adaptation that aids in swimming. They construct floating nests, often anchored to emergent vegetation. Their amazing courtship rituals may involve synchronized swimming, head bobbing, mutual preening and other intricate movements. They even “dance” on the water.



DISTURBING DEVELOPMENTS RE: ALBERTA WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT POLICIES

By Myrna Pearman

Recent changes overseen by Forestry and Parks Minister, Todd Loewen, are very concerning. With no public consultation and despite science-based evidence to the contrary, he (who owns an outfitting company and is a trapper) has opened grizzly bear hunting in the province so “problem bears” can now be “taken care of” by a pool of “qualified hunters” instead of trained conservation officers. He has also condoned a wolf killing contest, will soon open up elk hunting on elk farms, and may open up the season on cougars in the Cypress Hills (where there are only 12 animals). He continues to abdicate the responsibility of trained wildlife biologists and managers to hunters or trappers. These decisions have no basis in science, are being made against expert opinion, and do not reflect the values of most Albertans.

A recent unprecedented move to lift the trapping limits on wolverine, lynx, river otter and fisher in Registered Fur Management Areas is the most outrageous. Instead of investing in proven scientific approaches for monitoring these species, he plans to adopt unlimited trapping quotas over the next one to two years as a means of assessing population status.

Recent data, available to the Government of Alberta, shows updated wolverine population counts of less than 1000 individuals, sufficient to consider the species ‘threatened’. Contrary to Minister Loewen’s assertion, one of the most effective ways to recover the species is to reduce trapping!

According to Mirjam Barrueto, a researcher studying wolverines at the University of Calgary, “All research in Canada and Alberta has shown that harvest is the main source of human-caused wolverine mortality, and needs to be kept at very low levels so that populations don’t start to shrink, unless there are large, untrapped, thriving populations nearby that can function as a source population. Wolverines naturally occur at low numbers with low adult natural mortality, and have extremely low reproductive rates. This means that unlike other animals, they cannot rebound quickly to make up for increases in mortality.”

The latest research by Barrueto and colleagues suggests that there has been a population decline of 40% over the past 10 years in an area that was largely protected. She notes, “The wolverine population in Alberta 20 years ago was estimated to be below IUCN [International Union for Conservation of Nature] thresholds for vulnerable (threatened) species, at fewer than 1000 mature individuals. At that point, there was already concern about population declines. Our new Alberta-wide wolverine density estimate is currently going through peer-review and will be published soon. Preliminary results show that there are less than 1000 total individuals in Alberta. Substantially increasing harvest mortality even for one or two years is very likely going to have detrimental effects on Alberta’s wolverine populations.” This information has been shared with Alberta Environment and Protected Areas, which is finalizing an updated *Status Report* on wolverine.

Even without this new information, we have known for decades that trapping is one of the greatest threats to wolverines. The [2002 Report of Alberta’s Endangered Science Conservation Committee](#) states, “the trapping of only a few individuals has a large potential

to affect negatively the reproductive success of the [wolverine] population, and recovery from any population decline will be slow.”

John E. Marriott, co-founder of the Exposed Wildlife Conservancy, adds, “Killing wolverines to count them is a nonsensical approach to determining the provincial population. We didn’t kill grizzly bears to count them when we suspected Alberta’s grizzlies were threatened in the early 2000s, instead, we employed intensive non-intrusive DNA studies to properly count the bears and list them as Threatened in 2010. The same methods work for wolverines and should be employed to count them across the province, especially the boreal forest. Kill data only tells us where a wolverine used to be, it tells us nothing about how many there are or whether the harvest is sustainable.”

We need to flood both the Premier (premier@gov.ab.ca) and Minister Loewen (fp.minister@gov.ab.ca) with emails, with cc’s to Shadow Minister for Environment and Protected Areas Sarah Elmeligi (Sarah.Elmeligi@assembly.ab.ca), your MLA (find their contact [here](#)) and AWA (rluo@abwild.ca).

For more information, contact: Ruiping Luo, Alberta Wilderness Association (rluo@abwild.ca; 403-283-2025); John Marriott, Exposed Wildlife Conservancy (johnemarriott@gmail.com, 403-688-3851); Mirjam Barrueto, University of Calgary (Mirjam.barrueto@ucalgary.ca)

- There are 1691 traplines in Alberta. Even at the previous limit of 1 wolverine per trapline, there were more traplines than wolverines.
- Wolverine can also have high rates of incidental harvest mortality, where wolverines are killed even if they are not the target animal.
- There are no limits for many furbearing species, including beavers and badgers.
- Trappers in Alberta require no wildlife management training; they only require a weekend trapping course to become licensed trappers.
- Trappers make up less than 0.05 percent of the population.
- The trapping industry (including fur farms) accounted for \$44M in revenue in 2018, less than \$1,000 per trapper per year, from a report by Statistics Canada.
- **Trapping is primarily a recreational hobby, not a livelihood.**



RDRN SUPPORTS RDP STUDENTS TO ATTEND ASPB CONFERENCE : RDRN was pleased to underwrite the registration fees of five RDP students so they could attend the Alberta Society of Professional Biologists conference, held in Red Deer in October. The students were able to attend sessions, network with professional biologists and share their research projects. Our thanks to Dr. Gabriella Iburguchi for coordinating their attendance!. RDRN also had a booth at the conference.



LEFT: Jason Kelliber, Dr. Gabriella Iburguchi, Felix Beaver, Sanjana Sharma ABOVE: Irina Sberidan, Campbell Skelton, Sanjana Sharma, Felix



IN THE ALBERTA WILDERNESS WITH DON AUTEN; JUMPING MICE

Although these tiny mammals have been hibernating since August, I thought I would talk about them this month. There are two species in Alberta, the Meadow Jumping Mouse and the Western Jumping Mouse. They are very difficult to tell them apart and, although I have set up camera traps specifically to photograph them, I have captured them only three times. These mice are so named because they have oversized hind feet and a very long tail. They can jump up to one metre (3 ft.) when startled! They prefer moist habitats so they are most common around sloughs and other wet areas. They are quite comfortable swimming and can dive up



to one metre (3 ft.), a tactic they will use to evade predators if they are startled near water. If they are startled on land, they will make two or three quick long jumps and then freeze in place hoping the predator is confused as to where they ended up. I'll be trying for more photos of them in the spring.

NATURE CENTRAL

RDRN has hired Abbey van Heuvel on a part-time basis to update property visits, revitalize our social media, and plan outings to selected properties. Abbey's first outing will be on **Saturday, December 28th at Burns Nature Park from 1:00 PM to 3:00 PM.** Please email nir.rdrn.nature@gmail.com if you plan to attend. More details can also be found at naturecentral.org and on the RDRN website/social media.



Social Media: 3074 Facebook Members; 313 X Followers; 506 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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