

The Red Deer River Naturalist



September 2025

Editors: Myrna Pearman & Susan van der Hoek



Diversity of Ground Squirrel Species in Alberta



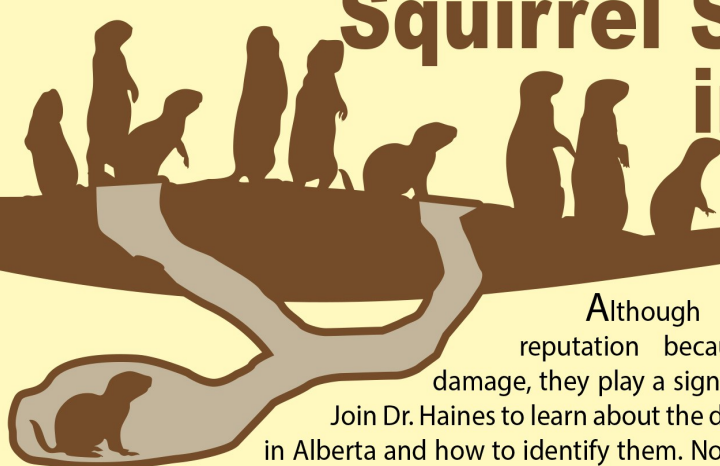
25

September 2025

7:00 PM

Kerry Wood

Nature Centre
Red Deer



Although Ground Squirrels have a bad reputation because they can cause property damage, they play a significant role in healthy ecosystems. Join Dr. Haines to learn about the diversity of Ground Squirrel species in Alberta and how to identify them. Not only will she share details about the importance of Ground Squirrels and conservation initiatives in Alberta, she will also offer suggestions about how to manage Ground Squirrel conflicts.



Photos Provided by Dr. Jessica Haines



Dr. Jessica Haines is an Assistant Professor at MacEwan University. She is a wildlife and conservation biologist who works on Franklin's Ground Squirrel conservation in Alberta. She also enjoys teaching undergraduate classes and sharing her knowledge at public events. In her spare time, Dr. Haines likes to be outdoors exploring nature while hiking, fishing or hunting, usually accompanied by her two Labrador retrievers.

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All are Welcome

NATURE CENTRAL

This summer, Nature Central hosted a variety of events and activities focused on exploring and enjoying natural areas within a 100 km radius of Red Deer. Many of these events were organized by Abbey Van Heuvel with the oversight of RDRN's Myrna Pearman. From hikes and species counts to family programs and paddle nights, these activities gave people a chance to get outside, learn about local flora and fauna, and spend time in nature.

On May 25, participants joined Ed Karpuk for the May Species Count at Dry Island Buffalo Jump Provincial Park, spotting 29 bird species, 43 plant species, and even a cow moose - all while contributing to important citizen science efforts. The next day, on May 26th, over 80 students from Hunting Hills High School took part in a fully funded field trip organized by RDRN to visit Radar Hill. Led by Abbey, they explored this natural area and learned about the ecology of forests and wetlands. Then, on June 29, our Raven Ridge hike highlighted flowers and birds such as the Western Tanager and Ovenbird, followed by a relaxing canoe and kayak paddle along the Raven River.

On July 9, RDRN teamed up with Nature Alberta, KWNC and the Red Deer River Watershed Alliance for Family Nature Night at KWNC, where attendees enjoyed learning about owls with Tim Schowalter and volunteers Abbey, Myrna Pearman and Bree Chambers.

On August 20, 14 hardy folks enjoyed a windy paddle on Lacombe Lake. The evening started with a short talk by Anto Davis of the Lacombe Lake Water Stewardship Society, who outlined efforts to monitor and protect the lake ecosystem. Several participants enjoyed refreshments at Blindman River Brewery following the outing.



Josh Fletcher, a recent Prairie College graduate and passionate videographer, joined the team this summer to capture drone footage of select protected areas this summer under Abbey's guidance. This footage will be posted on our website and social media channels.

Ed Karpuk continues to work on the Story Map, incorporating new information, images and videos. Stay tuned!

Thanks to everyone who joined, volunteered and supported us this summer. Abbey will continue working for Nature Central into the fall and winter so she will be planning and leading more activities and events. For updated information, please check www.naturecentral.org.



RDRN Board of Directors: From top left—Anto Davis, Ed Graff, Rhian Engel, Daryl Beck, Bob Krutchen, Myrna Pearman
Seated from left: Don Wales, Rick Tallas, Brenda Garrett, Cherie Appleby. Cherie is our newest board member—welcome!



BIRDING TRIPS WITH CHRIS OLSEN

After our summer break, we'll return to weekly outings on September 6. Thanks to the Red Deer River Naturalists, we now have a spotting scope for use as needed. Contact Chris for questions and details (780-581-4430).

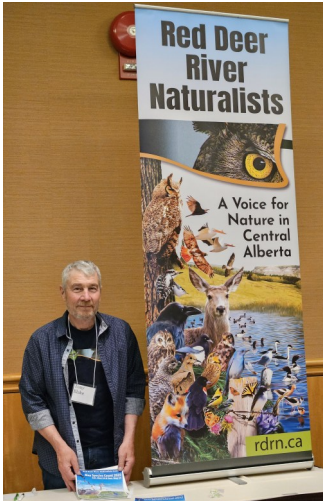
Outings start at 10:00 AM unless otherwise noted. Directions, maps and travel details (including schedule changes or destination updates) are posted on the RDRN website Calendar of Events. Birders of all skill levels are welcome.

September 6 – Alix Lake Nature Trails – meet at the campground

September 13 – Dry Island Buffalo Jump Park – meet at the day use area (The full hike is a five- to six- hour demanding outing so be well-prepared. A shorter option is available. Contact Chris for more details).

September 20 – Heritage Ranch Trails—meet in the first parking lot

September 27 – Slacker's Tour (Slack Slough, Cootie Ponds and Flemming Slough) – meet at Slack Slough



ANPC CONFERENCE IN RED DEER : The Alberta Native Plant Council held their spring conference in Red Deer on May 24-25th. Thanks to Tony Blake for representing RDRN and attending our booth at the conference.

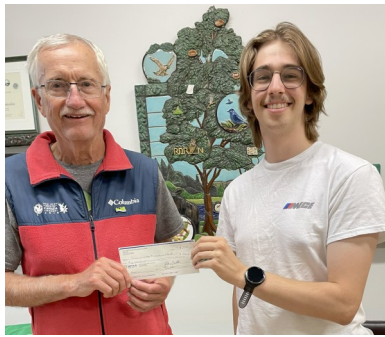
On May 25, 35 participants gathered at the Flewwelling Ranch for a morning of botanizing. From Morris Flewwelling: *We gathered in the hay shed for a smudge, land acknowledgement and prayer. Just as we started, an eagle circled the site. We started west of the corrals where the morning chorus and the sunlight created a wonderful introduction to the woods. The large group spontaneously broke into about three natural subgroups as everyone pursued their special interests. We had a grass specialist and a willow specialist so they helped lead subgroups and added about a dozen new identified species to our plant inventory. We showed people the bracken fern and the orchids as special items. The grouse drummed and deer were flushed up. Near the dugout we noted the crowfoot violet. Elizabeth Beaubien was unable to walk to see the violet so she was transported there in the Gator. We gathered back at the corrals about noon amid much chatter and excitement where we enjoyed drinks and tasty snacks courtesy of Eileen. The group gradually broke up with farewells and good wishes.*

RDRN GRANTS

RDRN is pleased to support nature-based organizations and projects through an External Grant Program. We recently awarded \$2,500 to the Buffalo Lake Nature Club for the purchase of a projector, screen and for promotional material printing.

We also awarded a \$5,000 grant to the AlbertaSat program. AlbertaSat is a group of volunteer students and faculty based out of the U of A who design, build, test and operate Cube Satellites. Specifically, this grant will support the Ex-Alta 3 project for the design, construction and launching of a satellite capable of gathering environmental imaging information. Ex-Alta 3 will image ice and snow coverage to support research in cryospheric regions. As well, during summer months, Ex-Alta 3 will image vegetation in at-risk and post-burn areas, in order to support wildfire research efforts.

Rick Tallas presents a cheque to Ex-Alta 3 project leader, Tom Cundict.



UPCOMING SPEAKERS

October 23—Ellie Coleman, Wilder Institute (Whooping Cranes)

November 27—Dr. Glynnis Hood (Muskrats)

CAMROSE WILDLIFE STEWARDSHIP SOCIETY PRESENTATION:

Myrna Pearman gave a presentation to the Camrose Wildlife Stewardship Society (CWSS) on behalf of RDRN on August 14.



CWSS is involved in many different conservation and stewardship projects in the Camrose area. For more information about their group—<https://naturealberta.ca/camrose-wildlife-stewardship-society/>

RDRN HISTORY PRESENTATIONS

RDRN historian, Rod Trentham, will be giving two public presentations about RDRN history at the Golden Circle. Both presentations begin at 7:00 PM.

PART 1—THE RED DEER RIVER NATURALISTS: SINCE 1898

Wednesday, September 24

PART 2—THE RED DEER RIVER NATURALISTS: ASTONISHING VOLUNTEER CONTRIBUTIONS

Tuesday October 28



DID YOU KNOW? WITH SUSAN VAN DER HOEK

A group of goats is called a band, tribe, trip or a herd, flock if domesticated. The only native wild goat species in Alberta is the Mountain Goat (*Oreamnos americanus*). Mountain Goats have all-white coats, beards and short, black dagger-like horns which are carried by both sexes. As members of the *Bovidae* family, these athletic alpinists are actually related to antelope and cattle. Mountain goats live in the high-altitude environments of North America's western mountain ranges, including subalpine and alpine areas, and are often seen on sheer rock faces and cliffs. Their specialized hooves and sure-footedness serve as a primary defense against predators like bears, cougars and wolves. Females (nannies) and their young (kids) often form groups during the summer, but males (billies) are generally solitary. They feed on a variety of vegetation. Mountain goats have no seasonal migration, but often trek to salt licks in the valleys.



FLOWER FOCUS WITH DON WALES

10:00 AM • September 17

Fall Flowers and Fruits by Don

Red Deer Polytechnic Natural Area



IN THE ALBERTA WILDERNESS WITH DON AUTEN: RED-NECKED GREBE

In May, I relaunched my trail cam float on a small shallow but healthy lake. This lake, abundant with aquatic plants and surrounded by cattails and willows, is an ideal nesting spot for Red-necked Grebes. These grebes construct their nests using floating vegetation, away from the shoreline. When a pair visited my float a few times in early spring, they were likely considering it as a potential nesting platform. They even left me a few beautiful photos. I selected this photo because it is rare to see a Red-necked Grebe out of the water. While these grebes are incredibly graceful swimmers, both on the surface and underwater, their legs are positioned so far back on their bodies that they struggle to walk on land and appear quite clumsy. This photo vividly illustrates how far back their legs are and the awkward stance they must adopt just to maintain balance. Another fascinating fact about these birds is that they are seldom seen flying. They primarily fly during migration, which occurs mostly at night. Once they reach their nesting lake, they remain on the water until it is time to migrate south again.



Social Media: 4738 Facebook Members; 298 X Followers; 537 Instagram Followers

The Red Deer River Naturalists, the first natural history organization to be established in Alberta, was founded in 1898 and incorporated 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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Photos, unless otherwise noted, by Myrna Pearman