

NATURE CENTRAL WITH ABBEY VAN HEUVEL



On November 23, six participants enjoyed a late-morning hike at Kuhnén Natural Area, exploring informal trails with stunning views of the Red Deer River Valley. Our walk took us through marshes and down a steep slope to the river, where we observed slush forming along the water's edge and signs of beaver activity on the poplar trees.



Wildlife sightings were a highlight of the day, including a group of Bohemian Waxwings, a Pine Grosbeak, a weasel in its winter coat, and even a cow moose!

DID YOU KNOW? WITH SUSAN VAN DER HOEK CROWS AND RAVENS

A group of **Common Ravens** (*Corvus corax*) is known by several poetic collective nouns: an **unkindness**, a **conspiracy** or a **treachery**. These terms originated in the Middle Ages, reflecting the ravens' reputation as mysterious or even ominous creatures.

Common Ravens are year-round residents in Alberta, found across all natural regions from forests to grasslands and cities. These intelligent and adaptable birds can be identified by their large size, black plumage and wedge-shaped tail. Their omnivorous diet and ability to thrive in diverse environments have earned them a "secure" conservation status in the province.



The collective noun for a group of **American Crows** is famously a **murder**—a term rooted in medieval associations with death and misfortune, likely due to their scavenging habits and presence at battlefields and cemeteries. Other names for groups of crows include **mob**, **horde**, **parcel** and **muster**. American Crows are intelligent, adaptable omnivores that live in both urban and rural areas of Alberta. Unlike ravens, crows typically migrate south in the fall and return early in the spring. They are also considered a "secure" species in Alberta. Crows are smaller than ravens, with more streamlined beaks and bodies. Their plumage can shine with iridescent

blue or purple hues when seen in sunlight.

Thanks to their intelligence and adaptability, raven populations are increasing in some areas (e.g., Edmonton).

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How to Tell Them Apart

- Ravens are larger and bulkier than crows.
- Ravens have a wedge-shaped tail; crows have a fan-shaped tail.
- Ravens have heavier, more robust beaks; crows' beaks are slimmer and more streamlined.

You may have heard a birdwatcher say a raven sounds like a crow with a cold



STETTLER-AREA CBC COUNTS: Stettler—December 14; Buffalo Lake—December 21; Red Deer River—28.
Contact buffalolakenc@gmail.com to register or for more information.

BIRDING TRIPS WITH CHRIS OLSEN

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.

On a recent Bird Focus outing, a large Mule Deer buck with several does near 22nd St in Red Der. Chris took some photos of the buck, which was carrying a tangle of Christmas lights. This image is a graphic demonstration of why not to festoon your low shrubbery with Christmas lights. The buck was in good condition and likely to survive, but it was a distressing sight to see him antler-trussed and dragging that mess.

December 13 – Gaetz Lakes; Wishart Trail walk and annual wind-up – meet at KWNC

December 21 – Central Alberta Christmas Bird Count



CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT INSTRUCTIONS

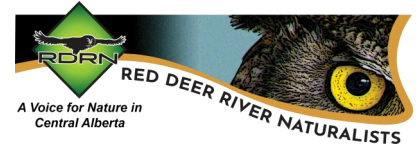


- Contact Shelley-anne or John Goulet at 403-392-1894 or email shelleyannegoulet@gmail.com if you'd like to participate.
- The official day-time count is between 9:00 AM and 5:00 PM. You can also Owl (count before or after these times). There is no minimum time limit, and you can watch your feeders or count birds on foot, by car or using any other mode of transportation.
- A Count area must fill (preferably) or fit entirely within a 24-km diameter official count circle. Count Circle outlines as well as tally sheets can be found at <https://rdn.ca/programs/christmas-bird-count/> Tally sheets can also be picked up at KWNC.
- It is important to record low and high temperatures, as well as snow and sky conditions.
- All counters must record hours and km. walked/driven/skied, etc.



You can also record any interesting or unusual bird seen any time during the Count Week (three days before and three days after the official Count Day). Please make sure, though, that you mark down when and where you saw the bird and what the bird was doing at the time. Add these birds to your tally sheet but make sure it is evident that it is a Count Week (CW) bird. Tally sheets must be received by Dec. 29. You can drop sheets off (Attn: Shelly-anne) at KWNC, or email to shelleyannegoulet@gmail.com. Put "CBC" in the subject line.

UPCOMING EVENTS & SPEAKERS



A Voice for Nature in Central Alberta

RED DEER RIVER NATURALISTS

December 21, 2025: Christmas Bird Count

January 22, 2026: AGM and Kevin van Tighem reading from *Understory*

February 26, 2026: Coastal Wolf Genetics with Michelle Hoang

March 26, 2026: Red Deer Polytechnique Student Presentations

April 23, 2026: Lorne Fitch reading from *Conservation Confidential: A Biologist Investigates the Clash between Progress and Nature*

NATURE ALBERTA: Nature Alberta hosts interesting monthly zoom presentations!

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

IN THE ALBERTA WILDERNESS WITH DON AUTEN: MUSKRATS

My trail camera float attracts a variety of ducks and other bird species throughout the spring and summer. Before winter, I remove the setup to prevent damage from freezing conditions.

Muskrats are also frequent visitors. Their feeding behavior involves climbing onto floating objects, such as logs or platforms, to consume aquatic vegetation. My float provides an ideal platform for this activity.

Although muskrats resemble small beavers, they are not closely related. Muskrats belong to the mouse family and are similar to voles but have adapted to aquatic environments. They can remain submerged for up to 20 minutes, using specialized flaps to seal their ears and nose, and their lips close behind their teeth, allowing them to chew underwater without swallowing water.

While muskrats are primarily herbivores, feeding on cattails and other aquatic plants, they occasionally eat clams, frogs and fish. Their name derives from two glands near the tail that produce a musky scent used for marking territory, and their appearance is characterized by their size and rat-like tails.



Social Media: 5640 Facebook Members; 305 X Followers; 556 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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Our thanks to McElhanney for generously donating the printing of this newsletter and NOVA Chemicals for covering postage costs.

Cover poster by Doug Pedersen

Photos, unless otherwise noted, by Myrna Pearman

