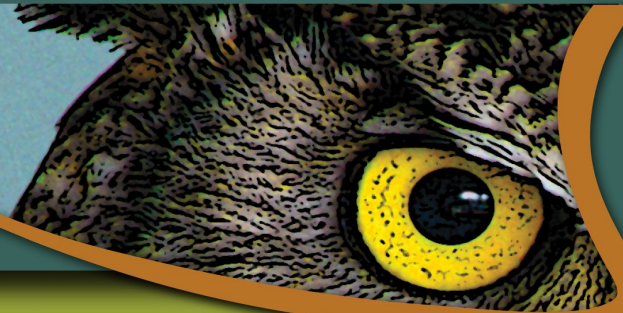


# The Red Deer River Naturalist



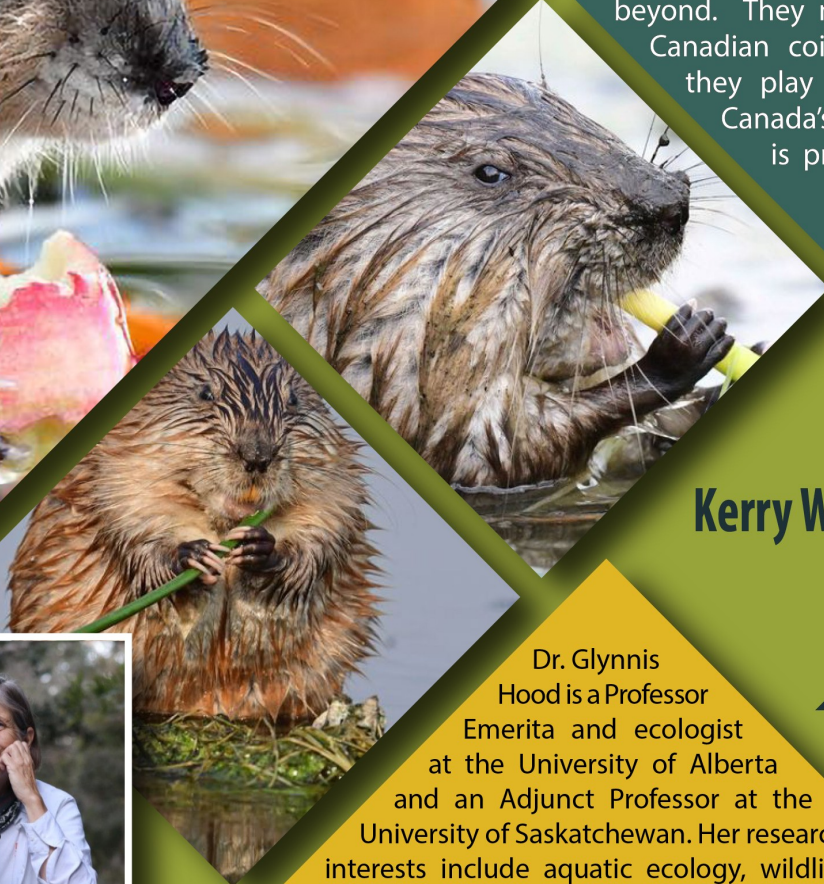
November 2025

Editors: Myrna Pearman & Susan van der Hoek



## Muskrats: The Not-So-Small, Yet Mighty Vole

Muskrats are one of North America's most widely distributed semi-aquatic mammals. Often overlooked, muskrats play critical roles in wetlands and beyond. They might not be on a Canadian coin, but the role they play in sustaining Canada's wetlands is priceless.



Photos Provided  
by Myrna Pearman  
& Dr. Glynnis Hood



Dr. Glynnis Hood is a Professor Emerita and ecologist at the University of Alberta and an Adjunct Professor at the University of Saskatchewan. Her research interests include aquatic ecology, wildlife biology and human-wildlife interactions. She is the author of *Semi-aquatic Mammals: Ecology and Biology*, *The Beaver Manifesto (TBM)*, *A Cabin Christmas*, and the newly released second-edition of TBM entitled *The Beaver Manifesto: Conservation, Conflict and Future of Wetlands*.

**27**  
**November**  
**2025/ 7:00 PM**  
**Kerry Wood Nature Centre**  
**Red Deer**

**All are  
Welcome**

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# NATURE CENTRAL WITH ABBEY VAN HEUVEL



In October, students from Burman University took part in a field trip to the Mary and Cliff Soper Natural Area, a protected site just outside of Blackfalds. The trip was made possible through bus funding provided by the Red Deer River Naturalists. During their visit, students compared a managed community forest with the more natural, undisturbed habitat found at Mary and Cliff Soper NA, learning about the importance of conservation areas while exploring the site's local biodiversity and examining the impacts of human activity on the environment. The group also took part in a ground-ing exercise as part of their field learning experience.



On October 26th, nine participants joined the Porter & Drake hike for a five-km walk through spruce and aspen forest along the Raven River. The group followed a mix of open trail and game paths, stopping at lookouts with clear views of the river and valley. Along the way, they came across an old den site on the ridge and flushed four grouse from the underbrush. It was a great opportunity to explore this 155-acre natural area and enjoy a refreshing morning on the trail with good company and mild autumn weather.



**NOVEMBER FIELD TRIP:** Abbey will be leading a trip to a local protected property in November. She will ensure that the property chosen does not allow hunting. Please contact [nir.rdrn.nature@gmail.com](mailto:nir.rdrn.nature@gmail.com) if you are interested in joining her.

## DID YOU KNOW? WITH SUSAN VAN DER HOEK BIGHORN SHEEP

A group of Bighorn Sheep is known as a flock, mob, or herd. The Rocky Mountain Bighorn Sheep (*Ovis canadensis*), Alberta's official provincial mammal, inhabits the western Rocky Mountains of the province. Once nearly extinct, ongoing management since the early 1900s has helped their numbers rebound to an estimated 9,000 individuals in national parks and provincial lands.

These sheep thrive in steep mountain terrain, using their split hooves and remarkable agility to traverse ledges just a few centimeters wide—safe havens from predators. They inhabit dry, rugged areas, grazing on low grasses, sedges and forbs, and browsing willows and other shrubs in winter. Because they cannot dig through deep snow, bighorn sheep migrate from higher alpine elevations in summer to lower areas in winter.

Rams sport large, curved horns that can weigh up to 14 kg—about as much as all their other bones combined. Older rams' horns may exceed 0.9 m in

length and 0.3 m in circumference at the base. Ewes also have horns, though they are shorter and only slightly curved. Both sexes use their horns for feeding and defense.

During mating season, rams compete by charging at each other at speeds up to 64 km/h, clashing their horns with a sound audible up to 1.6 km away. Lambs are born in spring on high, secluded ledges, safe from predators like wolves, coyotes and cougars. About a week after birth, lambs and their mothers rejoin the herd.



# 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.

**November 8** – J.J. Collett Natural Area – meet in the parking lot

**November 15** – Waskasoo Creek, Barrett Park to Gaetz Park – meet at Rotary Picnic Park, main parking lot

**November 22** – Bower Woods – meet on the street across from 37 Selkirk Blvd

**November 29** – McKenzie Trails – meet in the main parking lot

**December 6** – Riverbend Perimeter Trail – meet in the main parking lot

## RDRN HISTORY

**From the conclusion of Rod Trentham's October 28th presentation (Astonishing Volunteer Contributions):** *Had it not been for the generosity of John Jost and Grace Gaetz – quite distinct from his cousin St. Leonard – and the three members of the Alberta Natural History Society, Elsie Cassels, Hanna Pameby and Charles H. Snell who worked with him for two years to designate the Gaetz Lake Sanctuary a Federal Bird Sanctuary in 2024 — it would not exist. Then the volunteer steward, Kerry Wood, and his friends with the Alberta Natural History Society who prevented clearcutting it in 1946, put out a poplar fuzz fire, a road, and stood up against some crazy development proposals, means this Red Deer Jewell is here today.*

*Had three RDRN members with pro-bono help of another member had not spent 16 months negotiating with the province, Union Carbide and the Ellis's – there would be no EBF base for Myna Pearman to deliver her incredible environmental education initiatives and outreach for 33 years. What would have happened to the bluebirds and Charlie's lifetime of work? The Ellis's in turn provided the funds to establish the Red Deer Community Foundation and generously supported six non-profit organizations in perpetuity.*

*Without the concerted involvement of RDRN members in the planning of Waskasoo Park, what would it look like? Would the educational and preservation sentinel —the Kerry Wood Nature Centre—be here?*

*Dr. Sandy Murray's 1986 presentation to council about trying something different and countering the disinformation of the pro-chemical spraying Doctors in the council chambers was followed by Michael O'Brien's letter to councilor Surkan after the election. A vote of 5 to 4 meant that Red Deer contracted Grant Moir's Bio-Concept Group in 1987. The dry spring of a Big El Nino year was perfect timing for the experimental year. The Bacillus thuringiensis israelensis Bti selective pinpoint GIS treatments led to such an incredible detailed ecological inventory of Red Deer and the outskirts' flora, fauna and wetlands that the parks department received a 1998 Emerald Award for the Eco-Spaces Management process. No other City have data like this for planning.*

*Had Michael O'Brien not done the deep research on slumps in opposition to the Chiles proposal – most of us on the RDRN Issues Committee had no idea he was even working on this -- that Mayor Gail Surkan turned down in a 5 – 4 vote we might have a golf course on both sides of the Red Deer River. It ended up as a peninsular gravel pit.*

*This represents the Astonishing Volunteer Contributions of the Red Deer River Naturalists and their predecessors. We stand on the shoulders of visionary giants, and we must continue our fight for the protection of Waskasoo Park. This has led to a very interesting full-circle moment as the Waskasoo Environmental Education Society (WEES), which manages the Kerry Wood Nature Centre and Fort Normandeau, are taking over the management of the John Jost and Grace Gaetz House as a retrofitted eco-friendly education sentinel.*



Photos by Brenda Garrett

**NEW RED DEER CITY COUNCIL:** RDRN would like to congratulate the new City of Red Deer Mayor, Cindy Jeffries, and the current Council: Kraymer Barnstable, Tristin Brisbois, Bruce Buruma, Cassandra Curtis, Adam Goodwin, Chad Krahn, Jaelene Tweedle, and Dianne Wyntjes We look forward to working with the new team on nature and environmental issues.

## UPCOMING EVENTS/SPEAKERS

- December 21, 2025:** Christmas Bird Count
- January 22, 2026:** Kevin van Tighem (also AGM)
- February 26:** Coastal Wolf Genetics with Michelle Hoang



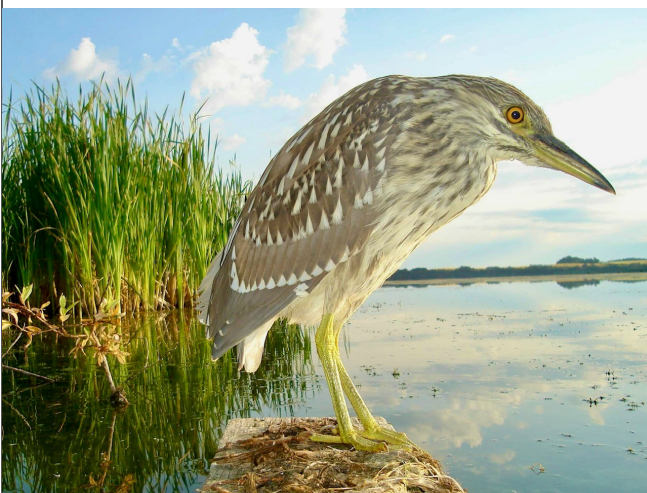
**BUFFALO LAKE NATURE CLUB**

***PLACE OF SPIRITS: GREENLAND AND LABRADOR'S TORNGAT MOUNTAINS WITH ROB AND MECHTILD BRENNEN***

**Thursday, November 20 @ 7:00 PM**  
St. George's Anglican Church, 4817-51 St, Stettler

## IN THE ALBERTA WILDERNESS WITH DON AUTEN: BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT HERON

Another fun thing about my trail cam float is when something uncommon stops by. Only once in the many years of maintaining my float has a juvenile Black-Crowned Night Heron dropped in and I was lucky to get a couple of



great photos. The brownish, streaky first-year plumage helps the birds hide amongst the marsh cattails, which is their preferred habitat. As adults, their plumage will turn more of a striking black on top and greyish undersides.

Black-crowned Night Herons, which are becoming increasingly common in the province, are most active during the night, late evenings and early mornings. They hunt the marsh edges and shallow waters for their main food sources, frogs and small fish. I was lucky that this juvenile was out and about in broad daylight. Interestingly, they are one of a very few heron species that bait fish. They will place an insect or other similar bait at the edge of the water in order to attract small fish, which they then catch for an easy meal.

**Social Media: 5489 Facebook Members; 301 X Followers; 549 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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**Doug Pedersen**

Photos, unless otherwise noted, by Myrna Pearman

