

# The Red Deer River Naturalist



February 2026

Editors: Myrna Pearman & Susan van der Hoek

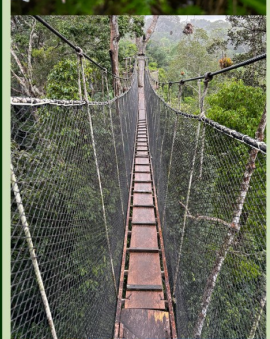
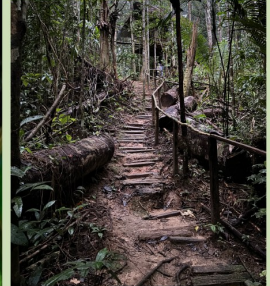


## EDUCATION AND CONSERVATION IN THE PERUVIAN AMAZON

**26** February 2026  
7:00 PM  
Kerry Wood Nature Centre  
Red Deer

This presentation highlights a biology teacher's experience in the Peruvian rainforest as a participant in The Morpho Institute's 10-day workshop, Educator Academy in the Amazon. Hear about her experience with bats, bugs, sloths and snakes. Enjoy photos of her adventures boating on the Amazon River, traversing treetop canopy walkways, and learning from local naturalist guides. Celebrate The Morpho Institute's support of the Indigenous Maijuna's conservation efforts, CONAPAC's far-reaching community work and a local bird club's successful binocular program.

Elissa Odgren is a biology instructor at Red Deer Polytechnic. She is a passionate educator with decades of experience helping students foster their love of biology and respect for the environment. Elissa has participated in a variety of research studies with reptiles, amphibians and bats throughout North America. She enjoys being in nature, reading books about biology and adding native plants to her yard.



Photos provided by Elissa Odgren

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RDRN enjoyed a successful 2025 AGM/wine and cheese evening on January 22. The AGM was completed in record time, then an appreciative crowd was treated to readings and an excellent presentation by Kevin van Tighem, as he shared stories from his latest book, *Understory*.

Below: Kevin and RDRN Board Member, Cheri Appleby; Right: Kevin sharing insights and observations.

# AGM 2025



ABOVE—AGM Presenters (from left): Rick Tallas (President), Abbey van Heuvel (Nature Central), Shelley-anne Goulet (Christmas Bird Count), Bob Krutchen (Treasurer’s Report), Rod Trentham (Gaetz Lakes Sanctuary Committee), Ron Bjorge (Ellis Nature Centre), Chris Olsen (Bird Focus Group). RIGHT: Outgoing board member, Anto Davis, overseeing the delicious AGM snacks.



**2026 BOARD OF DIRECTORS**, from left, Jesse Hays, Rhian Engle (Secretary), Rod Trentham, Bob Krutchen, Myrna Pearman (President), Brenda Garrett, Joanne Cundict (Treasurer), Ed Graff, Rick Tallas (Past President). Missing: Cheri Appleby, Don Wales, Daryl Beck

Photos by John Goulet and Myrna Pearman

## 2025 OWL AWARD— CHRIS OLSEN

Chris was born in Alberta's lower foothills and spent many childhood hours fishing, hunting and camping.

He obtained a BSc in Zoology at the University of Alberta where, during his fourth year, he specialized in wildlife ecology and management.

Chris taught at Lakeland College for 25+ years as an Instructor and Program Head, teaching wildlife and forestry courses, Field Ornithology as well as GIS and GPS technologies.

Beyond the classroom, Chris led the Outdoor Recreation Club, which involved annual outings where he challenged students to hike, climb, camp, paddle and to always observe and study their environment.

Chris and his wife, Susan, bought their home in Red Deer in 2008 when Susan was working for the court and commuted weekends until his retirement in 2020.

Chris started going on Bird Focus trips with Keith Kline in 2018 and commenced leading the trips in 2022.

The Bird Focus group undertakes between 30 to 38 outings per year, including Saturday morning outings, day trips and weekend outings. Through these outings, Chris has been instrumental in teaching nature appreciation, increasing the birding skill level in Central Alberta, and being a wonderful ambassador for RDRN.

In addition to leading the Bird Focus Groups, Chris has worked diligently as a concerned citizen and with the Waskasoo Community Association to defend the ecological integrity of Gaetz Lakes Sanctuary and Waskasoo Park.

Thank you, Chris! You are most deserving of the 2025 RDRN Owl Award.



## NATURE CENTRAL WITH ABBEY VAN HEUVEL



In 2025, Nature Central hosted nine events, including guided hikes, paddles and snowshoe outings (including one outing in collaboration with NCC), as well as two school trips (Hunting Hills High School and Burman University). We also partnered with Nature Alberta and KWNC to host a Family Nature Night. A total of 160 people participated in our events and over 100 students took part in field trips. Another highlight of 2025 was that we collected drone footage on several properties.

Along with Jim Potter, I have updated property information on our website and I am assisting Ed Karpuk develop an exciting new Story Map. Stay tuned! Be sure to follow us on Facebook and check out [naturecentral.org](http://naturecentral.org) for updates, a regular "Site of the Week" posting, and some new drone footage. We are now planning our 2026 spring and summer outings. If you have any favourite properties that you'd like me to arrange an outing to, please contact me at [nir.rdrn.nature@gmail.com](mailto:nir.rdrn.nature@gmail.com).

## Friends of the Blindman River

### Our Waters Event

### Guest Speakers & Annual General Meeting



Wednesday, February 25



Bentley Community Hall



Doors Open & Pizza - 5 p.m.  
Annual Meeting - 5:30 p.m.  
Speakers to Follow



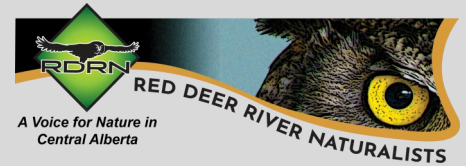
To register and to learn more, please visit  
[BlindmanRiver.ca](http://BlindmanRiver.ca) or scan the QR code.



*This event was made possible through  
the generous funding provided by the  
Red Deer River Naturalists.*

**NEWSLETTER EDITOR:** Myrna Pearman will be resigning as the Newsletter Editor to take on the role of RDRN President. We are looking for a new editor! If you are interested, please contact Myrna at [myrnapearman.nature@gmail.com](mailto:myrnapearman.nature@gmail.com).

# UPCOMING EVENTS AND SPEAKERS



February 13-16: Great Backyard Bird Count [birdcount.org](http://birdcount.org)

March 26, 2026: Red Deer Polytechnique Student Presentations

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

May 2026: May Species Count

**NATURE ALBERTA:** Nature Alberta hosts interesting monthly zoom presentations—<https://naturealberta.ca/events/>

## IN THE ALBERTA WILDERNESS WITH DON AUTEN: BARRED OWL

My trail cameras have photographed several owls over time, mainly Great Horned Owls at first, but more recently Barred Owls.

The Barred Owl population in Alberta has increased dramatically in recent years. In the Pacific Northwest, their numbers have increased to the point that they now pose a threat to the already threatened Spotted Owl. They are more aggressive and can easily outcompete the daintier Spotted Owls. The concern is so great that the western U.S states are planning to cull 500,000 Barred Owls over the next 30 years.

Barred Owls prefer a mixed deciduous/conifer forest habitat so the boreal forests of western and northern Alberta are ideal for them. Small mammals are their main prey but they will also eat birds, reptiles, amphibians and insects. I have a series of trail cam videos of a Barred Owl killing and eating a Ruffed Grouse which it attacked while the grouse was on his drumming log. It took 16 minutes for the owl to kill the grouse.

The main predator of the Barred Owl is the larger, more dominant Great Horned Owl, which will prey on eggs, young and even adult Barred Owls, often causing them to abandon territory.

I am concerned that the increasing population of Barred Owls in Alberta may pose a threat to smaller forest-dwelling owl species, such as the Boreal Owl, Northern Pygmy-Owl, and Northern Saw-whet Owl.



**Social Media: 6436 Facebook Members; 301 Followers; 562 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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Cover poster by Doug Pedersen

Photos, unless otherwise noted, by Myrna Pearman