

# The Red Deer River Naturalist



April 2026

Editors: Myrna Pearman & Susan van der Hoek



## Conservation Confidential With Lorne Fitch

▶ **23** April 2026 7:00 PM  
Kerry Wood Nature Centre  
Red Deer

*Conservation Confidential* is a compilation of writings that will engage, raise awareness, nurture empathy, inspire change and reshape perspectives on environmental stewardship. Exploring human-nature connections and stark realities, Lorne Fitch calls on us all to safeguard imperilled species and threatened places. He seeks to inspire change through education, motivation and a touch of righteous anger.

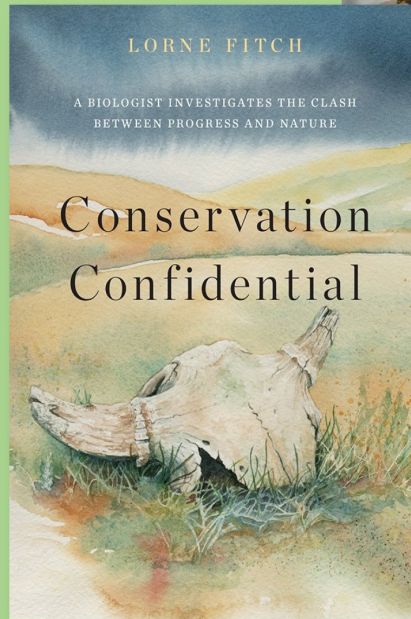


Photo & book cover provided by Lorne Fitch

Lorne has been a Biologist for over 50 years, working on many issues related to use of land and water. Lorne is a professional Biologist, a retired provincial Fish and Wildlife Biologist, was one of the co-founders of the stewardship initiative Cows and Fish, and a former Adjunct Professor with the University of Calgary.



Photo by Myrna Pearman

### NATURE CENTRAL



"Celebrating our Wild Alberta Parklands"

## Ed Karpuk - Story Map Update

*Ed will be unveiling the new and improved Nature Central StoryMap!*

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All are Welcome

## CITY NATURE CHALLENGE!

The 2026 City Nature Challenge to document urban biodiversity will take place on April 24 – April 27, 2026. Four of Alberta's major urban areas are involved this year and other municipalities are encouraged to take part!

Take photos of any wild flora and fauna seen April 24 – April 27 and upload your observations to the iNaturalist app or iNaturalist.ca. With over 30 Canadian cities taking part, we will see which area can make the most observations, document the most species and engage the most people. This is a free event and you can participate anywhere within your project boundaries. Look for plants, mammals, birds, insects, fungi, lichens, fish, or even microorganisms in your yard, local parks, natural areas or the lesser-explored places of our cities!



**2026 DATES:** April 24 to April 27 - Observation Period: Taking pictures of wild plants and animals. April 28 to May 10 - Upload and Identification. Results will be announced on **Monday May 13**.

**RED DEER AREA DETAILS:** **Locations:** Red Deer County and Lacombe County, which includes Red Deer, Lacombe, Bentley, Blackfalds, Bowden, Eckville, Innisfail, Penhold, and Sylvan Lake. **Organizer:** Anne Dempsey  
Join the iNaturalist project: <https://www.inaturalist.ca/projects/city-nature-challenge-2026-red-deer-area>



**CORB LUND COMING TO RED DEER  
SATURDAY, APRIL 4 – 11:30-12:30  
WWW.COALPETITION.CA**



## BIRD FOCUS GROUP 2026 - SPRING SCHEDULE WITH CHRIS OLSEN

Outings start at 10:00 AM unless otherwise noted. Directions, maps and travel details are posted on the RDRN website ([rdn.ca](http://rdn.ca)). Be sure to check the website (News and Events) calendar for schedule changes or updates. We're an inclusive group that learns from each other and birders of all skill levels are welcome!

**April 11:** McKenzie Trails Park to Riverbend – meet in the main parking lot at Mackenzie (shuttle as required)

**April 18:** Maskepetoon Park – meet in the playground parking lot (Kerry Wood Drive/Oak Drive)

**April 25:** Wainwright Sharp-tailed grouse Watch – Advance registration required – call or email Chris to book

**April 25-26:** Tofield Snow Goose Festival – Advance registration required for bus tours – see Tofield website

**May 2:** Heritage Ranch – meet in the first parking lot

**May 9:** Raven Brood Trout Station walk, 0900-1200 from the picnic shelter; Beaver Lake Kayaking 1300-1600

**May 16:** Alix Lake Nature Trail – meet at the municipal campground

**May 23-24:** RDRN May Species Count – see the RDRN website for details

**May 30:** Kuhnen Park trails (Blackfalds) – meet in the main parking lot

**June 6:** Riverbend upper trails – meet in the main parking lot

**June 13-14:** Medicine Lake camping (Jun 12-14) and birding (kayaking circuit and walking trail options)

**June 20-21:** Ferry Point/Bjorge Family Farm (camping weekend and/or Sat/Sun day trips - see RDRN website)

**June 27:** Radar Hill (meet at the end of the Rge Rd 260 access)

**Navigation:** Use the Alberta Discover Guide (app or free magazine), the Birding Trails Alberta website, or your favorite mapping app on your mobile device. Call Chris (780-581-4430) if you have questions. Participants are encouraged to carpool, but you are responsible for your own arrangements.

## DID YOU KNOW WITH SUSAN VAN DER HOEK

A group of larks is called an "exaltation," reflecting their joyful, soaring songs and skyward flights. A "bevy" of larks is used when larks are gathered on the ground, foraging or resting and an "ascension" of larks when rising into the air, often during flight displays.

In Alberta, the lark commonly referred to is the Horned Lark (*Eremophila alpestris*). This species is known for its distinctive yellow face and black 'horns' on its head, particularly in the summer months. The 'horns' are little tufts of feathers, visible only at close range.



Horned Larks are commonly found in the Grassland and Parkland Natural Regions of Alberta, where they nest in areas of bare ground or very short vegetation. They begin nesting very early in spring in barren fields, and the tinkling songs of the males come from high overhead as they perform their flight-song display.

Horned Larks are ground foragers and walk or run over open ground as they search for seeds and insects. Insect prey are mainly grasshoppers, beetles and caterpillars. They also will feed their nestlings invertebrates such as sowbugs and earthworms.

## NATURE CENTRAL WITH ABBEY VAN HEUVEL



Our February snowshoe hike was postponed due to cold weather, Fortunately, the weather cooperated on March 1, giving us ideal conditions for an outing at the Stonhouse property.

A group of 12 participants snowshoed nearly 5.5 km and covered three of the four quarters. The route led us up and down several hills and included a scenic stop overlooking a wetland area, where we took a moment to enjoy the quiet winter landscape. Along the way, the group discovered a white-tailed deer shed tucked in the snow - a neat reminder of the wildlife that calls the property home.

After a morning of exploring, we wrapped up the outing with hot chocolate. Many thanks to Stuart and Betty Ann for guiding us, and to everyone who joined us for a beautiful winter day outdoors.



**Buffalo Lake Nature Club: Mosquitoes are Cooler Than You Think**

**Mike Jenkins, Senior Scientist, City of Edmonton**

**Thursday, April 16 @ 7:00 PM - Lower Hall, St. George's Anglican Church, Stettler**



# UPCOMING EVENTS

Check the Nature Alberta website for upcoming events all over the province!

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



**2026 ANPC Workshop**

**GRASSROOTS GROW DEEP: LOCAL ACTION. GLOBAL IMPACT.**

Join us on **Saturday, May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2026**  
**@ Wild Rose Brewery**  
**Calgary, Alberta**

as ANPC highlights the impactful works of people and organizations working at a local level to support native plants in the province.




**Snow Goose FESTIVAL**  
 Tofield, Alberta, Canada

**Experience the Spectacle of Spring Migration**  
**APRIL 25-26, 2026**  
[snowgoosefestival.ca](http://snowgoosefestival.ca)

## IN THE ALBERTA WILDERNESS WITH DON AUTEN: RACCOONS

Raccoons are not common in Alberta, but their numbers have been increasing and their range has been expanding over the past years. They first appeared in southern Alberta and are now being seen around Edmonton and beyond.

Raccoons will soon be coming out of their winter dormancy. Although they are not true hibernators, they—similar to bears—put on a layer of fat in order to survive our long winters.



Since I started my trail camera hobby twenty-five years ago, I've captured only five raccoon photos. This photo was taken about 20 years ago in central Alberta. I had placed the camera along a trail to get photos of beavers travelling between a slough and a small copse of poplars. I got some good beaver photos but was most surprised to see that a raccoon had passed by.

Raccoons prefer wetland habitats, where they hunt for frogs, fish, insects, bird eggs and young birds. They will also eat fruit and berries and have easily adapted to living around humans. They become a nuisance when they discover garbage, bird feeders, pet food and nestboxes.

**Social Media: 6682 Facebook Members; 301 X Followers; 566 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