

# The Red Deer River Naturalist



May 2026

Editors: Myrna Pearman & Susan van der Hoek



## CENTRAL ALBERTA

# May Species Count 2026

## Sat. May 23 & Sun. May 24

We invite you to help us document the animals (including birds, mammals, amphibians, reptiles, insects and spiders) and flowering plants in Central Alberta! You can count in your own backyard, check out nearby parks and natural areas, or drive the backroads. This event is a fun way for the entire family to get out in nature and celebrate spring!

For tally sheets and further instructions, please visit <https://rdrn.ca/programs/may-species-count/>

Please register for this count with Shelly-anne or John Goulet at 403-392-1894.



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## SUMMER EVENTS

- Drs. Jessica Haines and Dale Leckie will be leading an Alberta Wilderness Association trip to Dry Island Buffalo Jump Provincial Park on June 20. Check <https://www.albertawilderness.ca/product/groundsquirrel/> for more information and to register.
- Dr. Geoff Holroyd will be delivering a presentation (*Are Tree Swallows the Canary in the Coal Mine?*) at the Legacy Land Trust's AGM at Olds College on Saturday May 2.  
Email [sally@legacylandtrustsociety.com](mailto:sally@legacylandtrustsociety.com) to register and for location details.
- Nature Alberta maintains a province-wide summer events schedule at <https://naturealberta.ca/events/>

### DON'T FORGET TO COUNT THE PLANTS!

Long-time RDRN member and botany enthusiast, Eileen Ford, encourages everyone to count flowering plants on the May Species Count weekend. Plants can be counted between May 28 and June 2. Be sure to record the date and all other information as requested on the official Plant Count Form.

Eileen, who has coordinated the May Species Plant Count for many decades, has passed the torch on to Tony Blake. Thank you, Eileen, for your significant contributions to botany in Central Alberta and beyond! Tony will have the forms with him at the April meeting. Contact him if you require further information: phone (403) 896-1189 or email [tonyblake@shaw.ca](mailto:tonyblake@shaw.ca).



*Yellow Lady's Slipper by M Carey*

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

Outings start at 10:00 AM unless otherwise noted. Directions, maps, travel details, and schedule changes and updates are posted on the RDRN website (<https://rdn.ca/news-and-events/>). We're an inclusive group that learns from each other. Birders of all skill levels are welcome!

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

**May 9:** Raven Brood Trout Station walk, 9:00-1200 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 (June 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. **Safety:** Wear sturdy, water resistant hiking footwear. Carry ice cleats as required by the season. Some trails are on rough or steep terrain. Carry water and an energy snack. Wear layers and carry rain gear, a hat, insect repellent, sunscreen and bear spray as required by season and site conditions. Let your group leader know if there are any potential medical issues. Unless otherwise noted, we leave our meeting point at 10:00 AM and local trips usually finish by about 1:00 PM.

## DID YOU KNOW WITH SUSAN VAN DER HOEK: LADY BEETLES

The collective noun for Lady Beetles (Lady Bugs) is a “loveliness.” The term “loveliness” was first used in 1486 in a book called “The Book of Hawking, Hunting.” They can also be called a *colony*, a *cluster* or a *swarm*. Lady Bugs belong to the beetle family *Coccinellidae*, which means “little sphere.” There are seventy-five species of native Lady Bugs in Alberta.

Lady Bugs do not damage your plants, and they eat aphids and other insects. Native Alberta species do not sting or bite humans, but they may give a light defensive nip. Unfortunately, there are two non-native species in the province—the Asian Lady Bug (*Harmonia axyridis*) and the Seven-spotted Lady Bug (*Coccinella septempunctata*). Asian Lady Bugs look similar to the native species, but they come in a variety of colours and have a "W" design behind their heads in an area that is a whitish color. Both of these non-native species will bite humans. They both eat aphids, so in the 1970s were introduced into North America to control pests. Note: Although aphids look harmless, they suck the sap from plants, so our thanks to the Lady Bugs for devouring them.



## NATURE CENTRAL

### THANK YOU ABBEY—WELCOME AMBER!



We would like to thank Abbey Van Heuvel (centre) for leading Nature Central for three years. Abbey undertook property visits and updates, oversaw our social media, assisted with the Story Map, and organized and led several outings to local protected areas. Thank you, Abbey, for your great leadership. We wish you the best in your new career!

We welcome Amber Breitenbucher (second from left) as our new Nature Central Coordinator. Amber is a professional biologist and is excited to join Nature Central to continue and expand our programming. Check [naturecentral.org](http://naturecentral.org) for updates and a list of upcoming outings.

*April 12, 2026: It was a cold, chilly morning today at the Innisfail Natural Area, but ten enthusiastic participants explored the site and had a wonderful time learning about rodent tunnels, feline tracks, woodpecker holes, moose behaviour and more. The crisp air made a memorable experience in nature. Thank you to everyone who joined and made the day so enjoyable!*



**MY LAST NEWSLETTER!** It is with mixed feelings that I oversee this, my last RDRN newsletter. Apparently I have been editing the newsletter for over 30 years (so says our Historian, Rod Trentham)!

I would like to thank my excellent co-editors: Susan van der Hoek (8 years and 2 months!), Judy Boyd, Dorothy Dickson, Peggy Birse and Sally Stuart. For the past several years, Susan has also updated the social media stats and coordinated the monthly speaker information (thanks, Sally Stuart, for arranging such great speakers!) with Doug Pedersen, our amazing poster creator. Thanks also to those who submitted their monthly Flower Focus (Eileen Ford and Don Wales) and Bird Focus (Judy Boyd, Keith Kline, and Chris Olsen) notices. Many thanks also to our regular contributors—Sally Stuart, Susan van der Hoek and Don Auten—for faithfully submitting their monthly articles. Thanks also to Fei San Thompson at McElhanney Printing for her amazing service, and to Phil French for distributing the newsletter by email.

Jesse Hayes will be taking over as Editor and I am confident that he will do an excellent job. MP.

## Mountain Bluebird TRAIL MONITORING GUIDE



## RDRN PUBLISHES AN UPDATE OF *MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD TRAIL MONITORING GUIDE*

RDRN is pleased to announce that this iconic booklet, first published in 2003, has been updated. The Third Edition is available for purchase at the Kerry Wood Nature Centre Bookstore or online from <https://www.myrnapearman.com>. A free, downloadable PDF of the booklet has also been posted to both the RDRN website <https://rdn.ca/about-us/publications/> as well as Myrna Pearman's website <https://www.myrnapearman.com/shop.html>. This PDF version contains live links to the websites as well as other online references listed in the book.

Proceeds from the sale of this booklet support RDRN's conservation, research and education programs. Celebrate bluebirds!

## IN THE ALBERTA WILDERNESS WITH DON AUTEN

I hope the ice soon melts so I can get my trail cam float back out on the water to get some waterfowl photos. I



have been using trail cams to photograph wildlife for many years; last summer was the first time I was able to capture images of American White Pelicans.

The population of American White Pelicans has been increasing steadily since the 1970s and, over the past few years, their population has increased dramatically. It is estimated that there are between 350,000 and 450,000 pelicans in North America. American White Pelicans nest in colonies of up to many hundreds of pairs per colony. Interestingly, there are only about 60 nesting colonies in North America,

with most located in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

American White Pelicans have the second largest wingspan of all North American birds, second only to the California Condor. Their long, broad wings, which can span up to 3.5 m (10 ft.), allow them to soar effortlessly and travel great distances without flapping. During migration, they catch thermal wind currents and rise to 3050 m (10,000 ft.) before they break away and soar until catching the next thermal.

**Social Media: 6958 Facebook Members; 301 X Followers; 574 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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