

# The Red Deer River Naturalist



October 2026

Editors: Jesse Hay & Susan van der Hoek



## Albertosaurus and the Great Tyrannosaur “Family”



**22** **October**  
**2026**  
**7:00 PM**  
**Kerry Wood**  
**Nature Centre**  
**Red Deer**

Mark Powers began his academic journey at Red Deer Polytechnic (formerly Red Deer College). He earned a BSc specializing in palaeontology at the University of Alberta, followed by an MSc with Dr. Philip Currie. He then completed a PhD with Dr. Michael Caldwell on snake evolution during and after the end-Cretaceous mass extinction. While pursuing his doctorate, he continued researching dinosaurs and collaborated internationally to revise Tyrannosaur systematics. This work led to the recognition of at least three new Tyrannosaur species, including a new Albertosaurus. Related fieldwork drew the BBC to

Powers and his colleagues, and the life of a newly discovered Albertosaurus specimen was brought to the screen in *Walking with Dinosaurs* (2025).



*Photos provided by  
Mark Powers*



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# SEASONAL SIGHTS AND SOUNDS OF ALBERTA

## with DR. SALLY STUART

It has to be said, of all the beetles I have encountered over the years, none are quite as magnificent as the burying beetles, which are carrion beetles in the tribe *Nicrophorini*. They play a key role as scavengers, eating decomposing dead animals while also influencing soil composition. Most members in the tribe belong to Genus *Nicrophorus*, the burying beetles or sexton beetles. Currently iNaturalist shows 11 species of *Nicrophorus* beetles present in Alberta.

My first encounter with one was the *Nicrophorus marginatus*, a striking beetle; approximately 20 mm in length with a somewhat round pronotum, 2 orange bands on the elytra and antenna terminating in a bright red/orange club – an apparent diagnostic anatomical feature of carrion beetles. Its thorax was covered in tiny arachnid mites, which are phoretic (hitch-hiking) mites in the nymph stage. Beetles transport these mites to carrion where they breed, feeding on the eggs and larva of flies. They share a symbiotic relationship with the beetles, often thought to be mutualistic. However, recent research suggests this is not necessarily always the case. Mites in high densities can affect the beetle's ability to move and fly, plus they have been found to consume beetle eggs and larva.

In order to breed, adult beetles must locate fresh carrion. Exquisitely sensitive chemoreceptors in their antennomeres, detect microbial volatile gases, emitted from the decaying body. Beetles have been shown to be able to detect a carcass less than an hour after death, flying several kilometres to reach suitable remains. Upon locating a corpse, male beetles emit pheromones to attract the female.

Their bio-acoustic ability is also fascinating - using abdominal files, which they rub against their elytron, known as stridulation, they produce a “chirping” sound. Such sounds are made when defending territory and throughout the breeding cycle. It is even speculated that the female may stridulate to summon offspring to feed on the carcass. Once adults detect a carcass, they work quickly to protect this incredibly valuable resource from rival scavengers and prepare a nursery for their offspring. Rolling onto their backs, using their mighty legs they slowly move the corpse to a suitable place for burial, which also prevents desiccation and controls temperature. Finally, the fur or feathers are stripped off.

At some point in this process beetles' mate, following which the female produces a clutch of eggs, usually in an alcove close to the burial vault. Factors such as female body size, nutritional status and perhaps even acoustic sounds produced by the male can affect the number of eggs produced. This safe moist environment is a perfect nursery for their offspring but unfortunately also for the rapid growth of bacteria, viruses and fungi. To prevent this everything is coated in antimicrobial chemicals plus microbes, secreted from the beetles' mouth and anus. Some species continue to look after the larvae feeding them regurgitated, chewed flesh until they are self-sufficient.

Even in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century Charles Darwin the eminent British naturalist was fascinated by the bio-acoustic ability of burying beetles. Much has been learnt since his time, but despite 200 years of research beetles remain an understudied group with many cases of at-risk species.

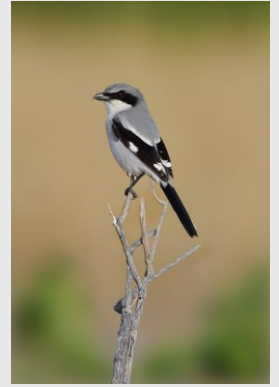


*Nicrophorus marginatus* with mites  
Photo by Sally Stuart

## DID YOU KNOW with SUSAN VAN DER HOEK

A group of Shrikes is called an “*abattoir*”, [*abattoir* is a French word for slaughterhouse], or a “watch”. There are two species of Shrike in North America, the Northern Shrike and the Loggerhead Shrike. The Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*) breeds in southeastern Alberta, southern Saskatchewan, southern Manitoba, and southwestern Ontario. The core of their Canadian breeding range is in the grasslands of the Canadian Prairies.

The Loggerhead Shrike is a medium sized songbird (slightly smaller than a Robin). It is grey above and white below with a black “mask” through its eyes. It has a hooked bill. It is the only predatory songbird, but lacking talons it impales its prey on sharp twigs, thorns and barbed wire and leaves them there as displays and a stored cache. They are called the “butcher bird” because of this behavior. Open pastures and grasslands with shorter vegetation are preferred by Loggerhead Shrikes, as they increase the bird's hunting efficiency. They are sit-and-wait hunters that stalk prey by hawking and diving from elevated perches. Loggerhead Shrikes make use of dense shrubs for nesting, surrounded by open habitats for foraging. Clutch Size is 5-6 eggs with 1-2 broods. In Alberta the species is considered to be of “Special Concern”.



Loggerhead Shrike  
Photo by Myrna Pearman

## NATURE CENTRAL

### with NINA SHERIDAN



Throughout August and September, the work with Nature Central primarily focused on updating the growing list of protected areas found within a 100-kilometre radius of Red Deer. This involved visiting 14 sites to assess for accessibility and suitability for hiking, taking photos and gathering information such as terrain and habitat characteristics as well as species encountered on the properties. We are excited to continue adding several new protected areas to the Nature Central inventory online, which is open to anyone who is curious to explore or learn more!



We are also happy to announce that our next monthly hike is scheduled for October 18th at 10:00 am near Markerville Natural Area, 42 km southwest of Red Deer. While the natural area itself is not easily accessible, we will be exploring a path at the end of Range Road 20 just south of the property for a short but beautiful hike along the river. If you are interested in joining or would like more information, please email us to register at [nir.rdrn.nature@gmail.com](mailto:nir.rdrn.nature@gmail.com).

Top: Boreal chickadee at Raven Brood Trout Station Site

Left: Male moose at Riverbend Golf & Country Club

Photos by Nina Sheridan



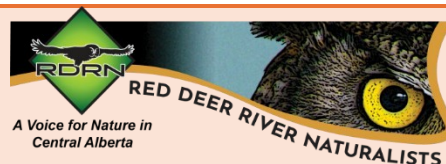
RDRN Large Grant Deadline October 15, 2026

RDRN offers grants of up to \$10,000 to registered charities, non-profits, and those clearly connected to an educational institution?

Find out more at [www.rdrn.ca](http://www.rdrn.ca)



# RDRN News



RDRN is pleased to support the installation of new solar panels at the Kerry Wood Nature Centre by donating \$10,000 to the Waskasoo Environmental Education Society.

Left: Todd Nivens – WEES Executive Director  
Right: Rhian Engels – KWNC Executive Director

On September 3, Rick Tallas and Myrna Pearman attended, on behalf of RDRN, a networking event hosted by the Community Foundation of Central Alberta (CFAB). Called *The Possibility Exchange*, the "friendraiser" brought together charitable organizations, volunteers, donors, community leaders and residents to build relationships, share ideas, and discover opportunities for collaboration. RDRN was proud to be a part of this event.



Myrna Pearman and Rick Tallas

## Birding Trips with Chris Olsen

Contact Chris for questions and details **(780-581-4430)**. Thanks to the Red Deer River Naturalists, we now have a spotting scope for use as needed.

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.

- Oct 3** – Crimson Lake (Amerada Trail) – meet at the parking lot
- Oct 10** – Nova Nature Trails – meet in the parking lot
- Oct 17** – Dickson Point/Trout Pond (south of Dickson for 4.1 km on Rge Rd 31)
- Oct 24** – Riverbend Upper trails – meet in the main parking lot
- Oct 31** – J.J. Collett Natural Area – meet in the parking lot

**Social Media: 8766 Facebook Members; 301 X Followers; 616 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.**

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**Cover poster by Doug Pedersen**