



THE HARLEQUIN

VERMILION FORKS FIELD NATURALISTS

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Editor June Hope 295-3524

Vermillion Forks Field Naturalist - AGM Report February 2013

The Club was very active in 2012. In the spring we visited the Owl Rehabilitation center (SORCO) and had a great turnout for the Meadowlark Festival here in Princeton. This was our year to host the Annual meeting of the BC Field Ornithologists, thank you to Madelon for encouraging us to participate in this event. It was a busy summer of Hummingbird banding (over 500 birds banded), field trips and work at Swan Lake for a biffy and picnic tables. I would like to thank everyone on the executive and Swan Lake volunteers for their involvement and support of the club. Everyone had worked hard and all deserve congratulations for keeping the club vibrant. Being involved gives you a broader appreciation of the club activities and educational component. Now we look forward to another busy summer, some interesting field trips and speakers. Enjoy the summer everyone!

The executive has some concerns re finances. In the fall of 2012 we suggested an increase in membership fees. Although we did not act on this, we feel we may have to implement an increase for 2014, because of the fees the club must pay to BC Nature and the Princeton Arts Council. Without an increase, we realize the club will not have funds to support our purpose as stated in the constitution and we feel that the educational component of the club is important. So the executive is recommending an increase in fees for 2014, the amount of which will be announced later this year.

This brings us to a concern re payment of membership fees. We really appreciate everyone paying their fees promptly. The club offers so many opportunities, such as hikes, speakers, and fellowship that the membership is a bargain for a reasonable cost. Please renew your membership promptly.

The Constitution was located this year and reviewed by a committee of Joann Gabriel, Joan Kelly, Charles Weber and Cathie Yingling with input by Del Hall. The Constitution remains valid and the only recommendation we have is the changing of our AGM date. The AGM must be held no later than 6 months from our year end date.

WANTED: Western Screech-owls

Lisa Scott

If you happen to be a night owl, you might be fortunate enough to hear the unique sounds of nature's night life, especially at this time of year. In our region, owls are the most commonly heard night-time wildlife, and it can be challenging to distinguish who you are listening to. This winter, the SOS Stewardship Program is working in collaboration with the Wildlife Tree Stewardship Program to record sightings (or vocalizations) of a particular species: Western Screech-owl. If you have black cottonwood, trembling aspen, waterbirch or other water loving trees on or near your property, you may have suitable nesting trees for this endangered bird. This owl relies on natural or excavated cavities in these trees, with cottonwoods being their preferred species. They will also use nest boxes. Screech-owls also need a dense understory of shrubs and grasses which support their prey: mice, voles, shrews, frogs, reptiles, birds, large insects and earthworms.

The screech-owl is rarely observed, so biologists are reliant on listening for their calls. Despite its name, this owl species it does not screech. It has two common calls: a hollow, whistled double trill, and a series of low whistles that speed up toward the end like a bouncing ball. Hooting may occur in every month, but is most frequent from now through April when they are seeking a mate. This small owl has conspicuous ear tufts and mottled brownish-grey plumage. **If you would like to assist with screech-owl monitoring or to report a screech-owl, contact Lisa Scott, Coordinator of the Wildlife Tree Stewardship (WiTS) Program in the Okanagan-Similkameen at 250-404-0115 or witsos@shaw.ca.** Visit our website www.wildlifetree.ca Funding for this WiTS project is made possible through the Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk.



Mussels and Rock Snot Oh My!

By Lisa Scott

What do the snakehead fish, rock snot and milfoil have in common? They are all invasive aquatic species known to occur in British Columbia. They are threatening BC's aquatic and riparian ecosystems, such as streams, lakes and wetlands, and the native wildlife that rely on these environments.

Fortunately, we don't have the snakehead fish or rock snot – an invasive freshwater algae – in the Okanagan or Similkameen Valleys. But we do have many other non-native, aggressive aquatic species that have invaded our natural habitats and there's potential for an onslaught of dozens more, if we fail to take action.

Like their terrestrial counterparts, aquatic invasive species (plants and animals) have been entering Canadian waters for centuries but never as rapidly as today. Fisheries and Oceans Canada states that aquatic invasive species have already been responsible for significant devastation of some native fish species and fisheries in Canada. Annually, the problem is responsible for billions of dollars in lost revenue and control measures.

Water-based recreational activities such as angling, boating and diving can spread aquatic invasive species to new locations. Plants, animals, and microscopic creatures can cling to clothing, equipment and boats. If not cleaned, these species can be introduced into new bodies of water.

Locally, there has been little attention on invasive aquatic species, with the exception of Eurasian water milfoil. Invasive plants like milfoil, and also algae, can form thick mats on the surface of the water, which can impede light penetration to underwater plants and animals, hinder boat traffic, clog intake pipes of boats, foul fishing lines and nets and cause a danger to swimmers. Once established, these species are extremely difficult, if not impossible, to eradicate. Economically, the impacts of aquatic invasive plants can be devastating. Many of these species can cause increased boat repair and maintenance costs when they become tangled in motors. Real estate values can become depressed on waterbodies with aquatic plant infestations like milfoil. Water intake structures on dams can be damaged from mats of invasive plant materials. Management strategies to address infestations are extremely costly.

Unfortunately, the concerns do not end with plants. In fact, aquatic invasive animals pose a far greater threat to our waterways. Of immediate concern are two freshwater mussel species, zebra and quagga mussels. These invertebrates rapidly colonize hard surfaces and can subsequently clog water-intake structures, impact recreation, alter food webs and affect water quality. Invasive mussels can affect entire ecosystems. Recent research has determined there is a high risk of invasive mussels not only surviving in some Southern Interior lakes, but there is a high potential for massive infestations.

Lisa Scott is a professional biologist based in Summerland. She has been the Coordinator of the Okanagan and Similkameen Invasive Species Society (formerly known as the South Okanagan-Similkameen Invasive Plant Society) since its inception in 1996. She can be reached at oasiss@shaw.ca or 250-404-0115. For more information on invasive species go to: www.oasiss.ca

Idle Chat

*Irene Logan beckoned us to observe some coyote scat that
had some paper in it with writing on it.*

Her comment --

"I guess he was passing on the information".

FIELD TRIPS: May – September 2013

May 17 Meadowlark Festival Joan Kelly 250-295-7743

Two field trips one to the Vermillion Bluffs and the Hoodoos and the second one to Swan Lake. There will also be a evening presentation at the museum of Jeff and Sue Turners "The Great Salmon Run".

June 8 Manning Property Peter Antonick & Janis Wright 250-295-7560

This will be a walk throughout a large acreage accessed along Copper Mtn. Road. There are a couple of ponds with many birds to be found at this time of the year, so it should be an easy excursion lasting approximately 3 hours. Meet at Billy's at 9:00 am with binoculars, camera, water and snack/lunch. Phone Janis to confirm.

June 22 Wolfe Lake Tip Anderson 250-295-3369

Tip will lead us on a 2-3 hour easy outing in the area of Wolfe Lake that will end with a wiener roast, so do bring whatever food you might like to heat. There is the option to kayak as well as hike, so two groups could meet for lunch at the fire pit. Meet at Billy's at 9:00 am with food, drink and boating equipment, if desired. Phone Tip to confirm.

July 6 Hole in the Wall Peter Antonick 250-295-3640

Bring your fishing rods on this field trip, as Peter will show us a thing or two about catching trout! We will spend 3-4 hours on an easy hike along his property down to the Similkameen River, where we hopefully will catch our lunch and cook it on the spot. Meet at Billy's at 9:00 am with water, food (if you're pessimistic!), camera and binoculars. Phone Peter to confirm.

July 20 Birding Excursion Amanda Lahaie 250-295-7596

The destination of this excursion is, as yet, unnamed; however, it will be an easy walk lasting approximately 2-3 hours. As an experienced birder, Amanda will locate and identify a variety of birds for those of us who are still novices. Meet at Billy's at 9:00 am and bring binoculars, camera, food and drink. Phone Amanda to confirm.

August 10 Hedley Creek Beryl Wallace & Marg Hamblin 250-295-4365

This will be an easy hike up the Hedley Creek, approximately a 2-hour trek, and we will have lunch at a picnic site along the creek. Meet at Billy's at 9:00 am with binoculars, camera, food and water. Phone Beryl to confirm.

August 24 Lightning Lakes**Janis Wright****250-295-7560**

This can be an all-day event if people wish, but the plan is to walk around Lightning Lakes in Manning Park, a 2-3 hour easy trek. Prepare to bring a picnic lunch, and for those who might like to canoe or kayak in the lakes, feel free to bring along your equipment. Carpooling will be advantageous, as there is a fee for parking. Meet at Billy's at 9:00 am with food, drink, camera and binoculars. Phone Janis to confirm.

Sept. 7 Kelly Peaks**Rika Ruebsaat****250-295-4006**

This will be a strenuous hike up to the beautiful alpine landscape of Jim Kelly Peak. The drive takes about 1 ½ hours. The first part of the hike is steep but then things level off and you're rambling through alpine meadows. The whole hike takes about 6-7 hours return. Meet at 8 am at Billy's with lunch and lots of water.

Sept. 21 KVR Trail**Ed Staples****250-295-0822**

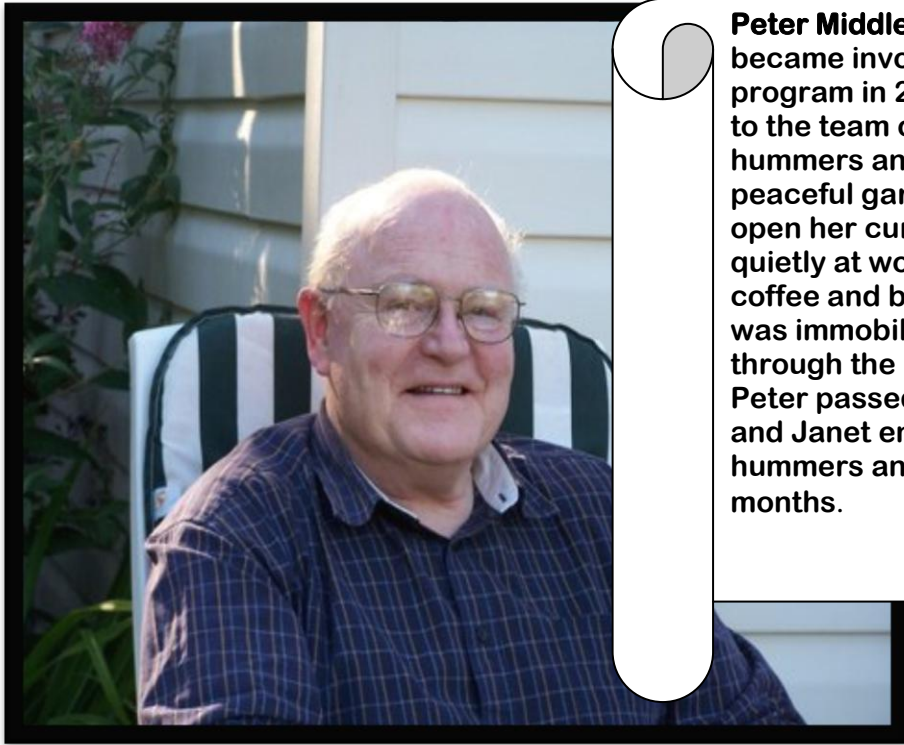
Ed will take us from Coalmont along the KVR/Trans Canada Trail, to White Sands, where we will have lunch, then retrace our steps back to Coalmont. Depending on the weather, hardy souls may want to bring swim suits for a dip in the river. The hike will take a few hours, but is all on the KVR, so it's flat and easy. Bring food, drink, camera and binoculars, and meet at Billy's at 8:30 am to carpool, or meet at the intersection of Coalmont Road and the KVR by 9:00. Phone Ed to confirm.

Wolves are now populating the Methow Valley around Winthrop and will soon be found in the Princeton area too. (If they haven't already arrived). To follow their progress you could look at this website. <http://www.northernlightswildlife.com/>
Note: Control click for the email version to follow the link.

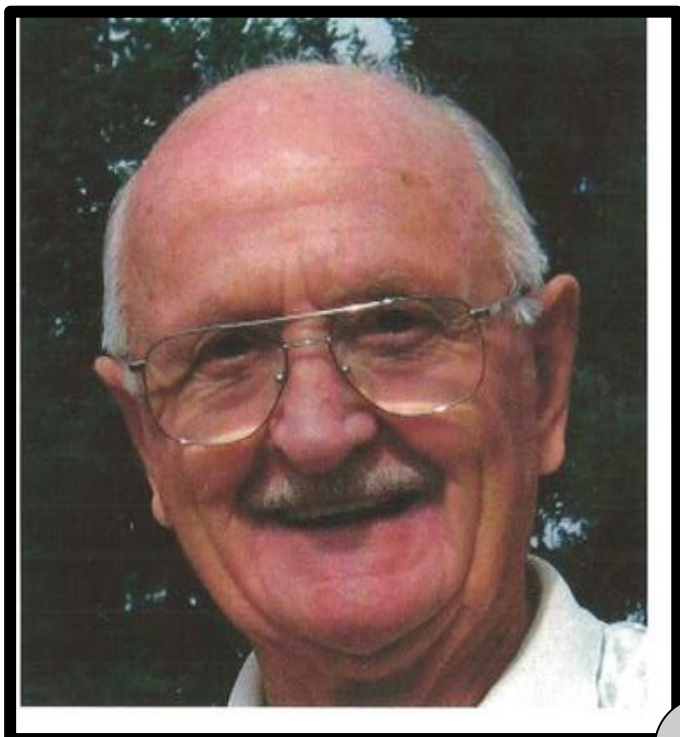
We have been asked by Forestry to spread around information regarding an up and coming wetland invasive *Flowering Rush (Butomus umbellatus)*. We are hoping people could put this pretty but nasty, species on their radar for the spring. If spotted please let us know, this is a high ranking provincial EDRR (Early Detection Rapid Response) species that is pressing up against the BC border and poses a significant threat to wetlands email to; irinvasives@gmail.com

Flowering-rush is an aquatic plant found along lakeshores and slow-moving rivers, and in water up to 9 feet deep. Although it resembles a true rush, flowering-rush is in its own family and can be identified by its attractive pink flowers. Native to Eurasia, flowering-rush was introduced first to the eastern United States and Canada as an ornamental and continues to be brought in to the country as an ornamental. It has spread to large areas of Canada and the northern United States.

**Vermillion Forks Field Naturalists
have lost two members this year.
They will be missed.
May They Rest in Peace**



Peter Middleton. Peter and his wife Janet became involved in the hummingbird program in 2010. They were as welcoming to the team of banders as they were to the hummers and all felt at home in their peaceful garden areas. Janet would often open her curtains to see the intrepid team quietly at work, she would inevitably offer coffee and baked goodies. Although Peter was immobile he enjoyed bird watching through the living room windows. Sadly Peter passed away June 25th but both he and Janet enjoyed the company of the hummers and banders during his last months.



Robert "Bob" Cormack, a member of Vermilion Forks Field Naturalists, passed over March 27th.

Bob and Margaret came to Princeton in the early 1960's and he was Principal of Princeton Senior Secondary school until his retirement.

Bob was an accomplished artist and donated many of his paintings to the local Rotary club.

He painted and maintained the large sign at Swan Lake depicting the unique kettle formations of the area

From BC Grasslands Newsletter February 2013

BC Southern Interior has been identified as an area containing ancient grasslands

Some see grasslands as land that is less costly to develop than other surrounding landscapes. Some see it as valueless unless it is changed into something else. Others see it as a renewable resource that will look after you if you look after it, and still others see it as a place to look at, play in and enjoy.

Grasslands provide substantive environmental, social and economic values, however the measures associated with these components are not as readily accessible as the value of a cubic meter of wood or an ounce of gold. Ask yourself what the value is of this :

- clean water and air
- biodiversity
- carbon sequestration
- a safe and secure food supply (grassland forage)
- a grassland landscape for recreation or culture.

You might find it difficult to give a quantitative answer. If on the other hand, you have to pay for these things tomorrow as some communities do today, you quickly come to the realization that natural landscapes provide these services at a very economical cost to society. When people think of visiting "old" ecosystems they will usually think of the giant trees on the west coast. However, to see ecosystems that are likely some of the oldest in Canada, one is better off to visit the alpine grasslands

Coming Presentations (second Tuesday of each month):

May 14th: Murphy Schewhuk "Tips & Tricks for Better Nature Photography"
Murphy is a freelance writer/photographer who has published books, articles in "BC Outdoors" as well as working with photo agencies.

May 17th: Meadowlark Festival "The Great Salmon Run" at the museum with Jeff and Sue Turner

June 11th Sue Elwell on Humming Bird Banding

September 10th: Zoe Kirk on "Bear Aware" from Wildsafe BC Community. Specifically relative to our area.

Advantages to Affiliation with BC Nature

Janis Wright

There has been some controversy lately among members as to the advantages of club affiliation with BC Nature, and consequently your executive would like to clarify the issue.

We collect \$25 for each individual membership and \$35 for each family membership. From that amount we forward to BC Nature a total of \$16.15 per membership, whether it is an individual or family membership. That fee to the naturalist federation provides us with insurance coverage, receipt of a quarterly magazine, and other, less tangible benefits.

Insurance coverage is a mere \$2.15 per membership, which protects us in the event of injury or accident while on a field trip. (This is why non-members must sign a waiver when joining us on field trips.) The remaining \$14.00 per membership entitles us to other benefits, which include the magazine that BC Nature sends us four times each year, with the goal of providing:

- Awareness, appreciation and understanding of conservation and environmental issues
- Informational articles written by experts on current activities, issues, places of interest, conservation reports, wildlife, endangered species, flora and fauna, and more
- Information on environmentally related tours

In addition to these informational returns, we receive the following services:

- Financial grants to support club projects, including a founding membership grant for this club
- A unified voice in the face of individual group resolutions, which allows the federation to present issues on our behalf to appropriate ministries, with the backing of 5100 memberships
- Entitlement to attend conferences and annual general meetings, which sponsors cohesiveness among clubs and naturalists, and provides exposure to environmental issues and potential presentations for our monthly speaker series

Excerpt from: Hope Beneath our Feet: Restoring Our Place in the Natural World

By Martin Keogh

“To know thyself is to become ecologically literate – to be sensitive to and informed once more, by the wind, by the trees, by the spoor of insects and animals, by the moods of a river, by the potency of solitude....and by the spoor and dreams of the 2 million year old survivor in all of us. It is a self and an identity that is impossible to define outside of a conscious relationship with the land, with people and animals”. Ian McCallum

The following information has been extracted from an article written by Matt Ellerbeck:

Although they are rarely given much thought, and often overlooked when they are, salamanders are in crisis. Approximately half of all the world's salamander species are listed as threatened by the *International Union for Conservation of Nature* (IUCN). A further 62 species have been designated as near-threatened, with rapidly dwindling populations. For some salamanders it is already too late, as both the **Yunnan Lake Newt** and **Ainsworth's Salamander** are now extinct. Salamanders have been on the earth for over 160 million years, and the terrible state that they now find themselves in is due to the detrimental acts of humans.

- One of the biggest issues affecting salamanders is the loss of their natural habitat. Habitats of all kinds are being lost at an alarming rate. Wetlands are drained, forests are logged and cut down, and waterfronts are developed.
- Where natural habitats do still exist, they are often fragmented, creating an isolation that prevents gene flow between populations. This increases inbreeding, resulting in decreasing genetic variability and birthing of weaker individuals, which often ends with much of the population being killed or not reproducing.
- According to the *Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada*, there is evidence that certain salamander species have individuals that return to their breeding site once they reach maturity. Consequently, destruction of a breeding pond may result in loss of the entire population returning to that site.
- Industrial contaminants, sewage run off, pesticides, oils, and other toxic substances from construction sites and human settlements can all be absorbed by salamanders, and quickly lead to deaths and horrific deformities. A study at *Purdue University* found that 8% of 2,000 salamanders had visible deformities.
- Many common herbicides are labelled eco-friendly with low risk to surfactant-sensitive species when applied to upland sites, but salamanders that breed in water also routinely use non-aquatic areas and can easily be exposed to glyphosate formulations that contain harmful surfactants.
- Habitat destruction and degradation can also effect the availability of prey items, causing unnatural declines in appropriate food sources.
- Salamanders that are migrating to breeding sites often must cross roads to reach such areas, and many are killed. The *Wetlands Ecology and Management* (2005) population projections for **Spotted Salamander** life tables imply that an annual risk of road mortality for adults of greater than 10% can lead to local population extirpation. Unfortunately, it is estimated that mortality rates are often as high as 50 to 100%, which means that reducing road mortality is paramount to preserving salamander species.
- Being hit and killed by vehicles is not the only threat that roads create for salamanders. Chemical run-off from vehicles contaminates roadside ditches and pools. These sites are often utilized by salamanders for breeding and birthing. According to a 2012 study, survival in roadside pools averaged just 56%, as compared to 87% in woodland pools.
- Salamanders are also threatened when they are harvested from the wild. Salamanders are taken for the pet trade, for food markets (mudpuppies), and for use as fishing bait.
- There is much about salamanders that scientists do not know. Aspects of the biology, ecology, and lifestyles of many species is a mystery. This undoubtedly means human interference is negatively affecting salamanders in ways in which we don't even know. The intricate relation between all species and the vital roles they play within eco-systems is also being altered. Such alterations can have serious consequences to not just salamanders, but many other animals as well (including humans).

To find out how you can help please see: www.savethesalamanders.com



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I, the undersigned, apply for membership in the Vermilion Forks Field Naturalist Society (The Naturalists) and acknowledge that I am aware of the risks inherent in participating in the activities of the society, and do hereby, in consideration of this membership, for myself, my heirs, executors, administrators and assigns, release and forever discharge and agree to indemnify the Naturalists, their members, directors, officers, trip leaders, agents or representatives from and against all claims, actions, costs, expenses and demands by reason of any damage, loss, death, injury, disability or psychosis arising out of or in any connection with my participation in these activities, notwithstanding that the same may have been contributed to by the negligence of the Naturalists. I (we) accept the terms of this release from liability. I (we) are 19 years or older

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