



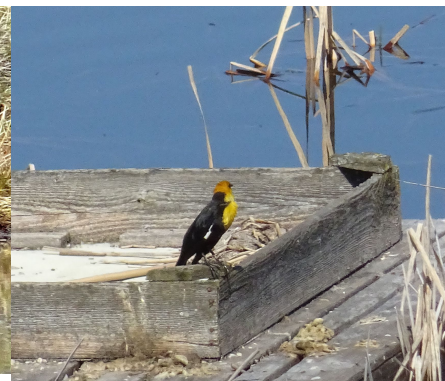
THE HARLEQUIN

VFFN NEWSLETTER—SPRING EDITION—2018

When the Sagebrush Buttercup starts to appear everywhere, then it is a sure sign that spring has arrived. It is soon followed by the Small Flowered Woodland Star, Western Spring Beauty, and the magnificent Arrow Leaved Balsamroot. After that, numerous species miraculously start to appear.



Birders were equally happy with all the species arriving on the scene, and this year with the abundant pools of water everywhere the birds were plentiful. On World Bird Day, our birders saw and recorded 60 species which was a very impressive record for Princeton. The outing to Road 22 & environs, one of our first spring outings, was rewarding with the number of species seen at the different stops that were made.



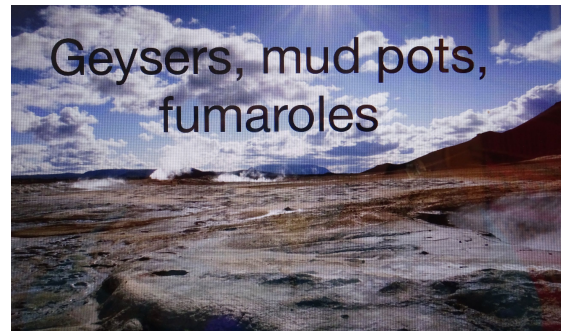
EVENING PRESENTATIONS

DATE: March 13, 2018

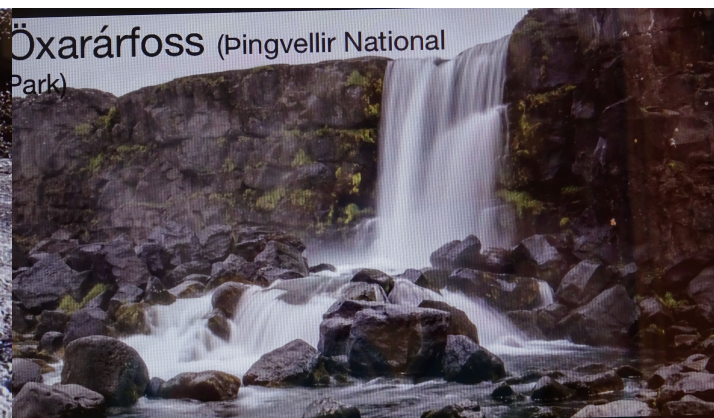
SPEAKER: Gerry Buzzell

TOPIC: Iceland—Fire and Ice

Gerry Buzzell's presentation was a dazzling array of incredible images. These images typified fire (activity of volcanos) and ice (activity from glaciers). Fire from volcanos left an intriguing landscape of basalt columns, black sands and lava fields. Instead of white sand beaches, Iceland has black sand beaches composed of a multitude of small pebbles, making beaches unusual and beautiful. In some areas, hills project from a flat landscape. There are also geysers, mud pots, and fumaroles, demonstrating the violent activity still occurring underneath the earth's surface. In 2010 the eruption of Eyjafjallajökull blackened the skies of Europe and created havoc in air travel.



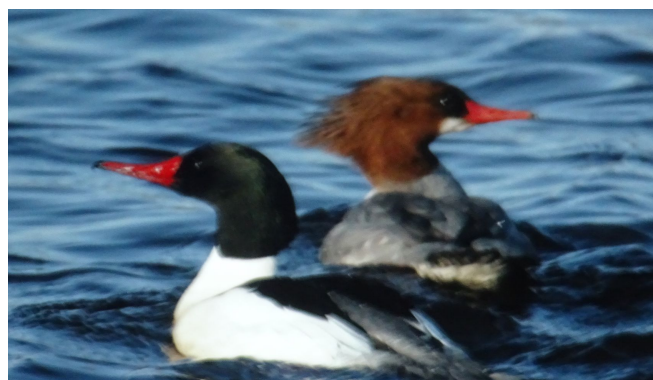
Ice in the form of glaciers comprises a large portion of the island. The resulting effect is numerous waterfalls which seem to originate on flat surfaces of land, that is, water rushing on the surface then cascading down deep embankments. In most instances they are quite accessible to the visitor. It was an enjoyable evening. The presentation gave the audience an opportunity to see sights that few of us will ever see.



DATE: April 10, 2018
SPEAKER: Ed Lahaie
TOPIC: Local BC Birds



Ed Lahaie loves to share his knowledge of birds which is considerable, and he did this with his presentation of BC birds of the Similkameen/Okanagan area. According to experts there are 250 species in this area. The presentation was well done as a video with incredible photos of birds. The 4 hour video was compressed into one hour, which needless to say, involved a lot of work. The video finished with appreciative applause from the audience.



DATE: May 8, 2018
SPEAKER: Heather & John Neville
TOPIC: Owls of Canada

John & Heather Neville have many interests and one of those is travelling and recording the sounds of owls. Sometimes John goes to great lengths to record these calls, that is to unlikely places in hopes of finding what he is seeking. His presentation consisted of showing the owls and the calls it makes which was an interesting way of presenting information. John is legally blind and his notes were all in braille and his wife runs the projector to ensure the correct photo is displayed. They worked really well as a team. The audience gain a good appreciation of a type of bird that is often not seen.



SPECIAL RECOGNITION:

Bob Coyne receives recognition for making a donation box to be placed at Swan Lake. John Henry suggested the idea to the club. He thought that visitors to Swan Lake would be interested in helping maintain the site. Johanna Nott (VFFN member) pursued the idea and Bob Coyne made the box. The donation box will be placed at the Gazebo. A big thanks goes to everyone involved.



SPECIAL REPORT:

Avoiding Snakbites: A guide to co-existing with snakes!

Matt Ellerbeck (A.K.A The Snake Man) - Snake Advocate & Conservationist

Snakes are among the world's most misunderstood and feared creatures. However, the horrible reputation that snakes have is not deserved. Snakes will not make unprovoked attacks on people. When a person comes in contact with a snake, the animal's first instinct will be to rapidly flee the area and find shelter. If the snake doesn't do this, it may just stay perfectly still to try to blend in with the surroundings. Even if the snake is captured, it may still not resort to biting – proof of its gentle demeanour. The snake has several harmless tactics it can resort to as an alternative to biting. The snake may hiss, make mock strikes with a closed mouth, or flail around to try and escape. This is the snake's way of saying just leave me alone!

An account of the true nature of snakes can be found in a study done by University of Georgia Professor Dr. Whit Gibbons. The following excerpt from Dr. Gibbons' study speaks for itself:

“All the snake species tested have had the same initial response to human presence. If given the opportunity, they escape—down a hole, under a ledge, or in the case of cottonmouth snakes, into the water. Escape is even the standard behaviour of enormous diamondback rattlesnakes, which will immediately disappear if they have enough warning before they think a person can reach them. The snakes just want us to leave them alone.”

Snake bites on humans usually only happen when someone is deliberately trying to provoke or harm a snake, and the animal bites purely in self defence. According to NC State University, almost 80% of snake bites happen when someone is trying to capture or kill the snake. All these facts show that snakes are not aggressive or evil animals. If you provoke and capture a wild animal, what can you expect but to be bitten since the animal is going to try to defend itself?

Edward R. Ricciuti's *The Snake Almanac* (Lyons Press 2001), states “that venomous snakes do not look for people to bite” and Mark O' Shea's *Venomous Snakes of the World* (Princeton University Press 2005), proclaims “that people must realize that snakes are not out to bite them but prefer to be left alone.”

Sometimes hikers and campers will encounter a snake when the animal is out basking in the sun or forging for food. When startled, the snake may slither rapidly towards the direction of shelter (like a burrow or under a rock). When the snake darts suddenly, it may give the illusion that it is chasing after you. This is not true though. Sadly, people's anxiety in such a situation only fuels the belief that the snake was pursuing them.

It is also important to remember that most snakes are completely harmless. In fact only around 13% of all snake species are venomous. Of this small number, even less are equipped with venom that is strong enough to seriously harm a human being.

If a venomous snake does bite a person, often no venom is injected into the bite. This is called a dry bite. Snakes have venom first and foremost as a means to quickly subdue their prey. The venom also helps the snake digest its meal, as it aids in breaking down the prey internally. This is important as snakes do not chew their food but swallow it whole. As humans are too big for snakes to eat, they will not want to waste their precious venom on us.

If the snake does inject venom, proper medical treatment and anti-venom can usually save the person's life. According to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, only about 0.2% of people bitten by snakes in United States actually die from the bite. According to the University of Melbourne's 'Snakebite Mortality In Australia' (2003), death from venomous snakebite in Australia is relatively uncommon. Ontario is home to just one species of venomous snake, the Massasauga rattlesnake. It is a shy species that prefers to avoid people. There have only been two fatalities in Ontario linked to snakebite ever, and in both cases the victims did not receive appropriate medical treatment which almost certainly would have saved their lives.

It is very easy to co-exist with snakes, especially since they do many useful things for people. First of all, snakes are great controllers of rodents like rats and mice. Without snakes, rodent populations would surge and these creatures would destroy crops, affecting our food supply. Rodents also spread harmful diseases which can seriously affect our health. Snakes are great at hunting rodents because they can crawl into small burrows and other areas that rodents use as shelters. These places are too small for other predators to get into.

Snakes also help stop the spread of Lyme disease. According to a study conducted through the University of Maryland, a single Timber Rattlesnake eats up to 4,500 ticks a year! Small rodents often carry the bacteria (genus *Borrelia*) that produces Lyme Disease. When ticks bite these rodents, they can later drop off and then spread the disease to humans or pets. Luckily, snakes prey heavily on rodents, and then in turn the ticks attached to them! Therefore, snakes are extremely useful to people, as they help stop the spread of this disease.

Furthermore, snakes are saving the lives of countless numbers of people every year. Snake venom is being used in the medical field to treat all sorts of serious ailments like heart and stroke disease, cancer, Parkinson's, blood clots, and many more. Despite these benefits, countless numbers of snakes are killed by fearful people every year. We must look past our fear and ignorance and see snakes for what they really are - interesting creatures that play very important roles in the eco-system. A fear of snakes can be a learned behaviour, so we must learn not to pass our irrational fears onto our children, but teach them to respect wildlife.



Eastern Milk Snake (non
venomous)



Massasauga Rattlesnake

**A WALK ON THE WILD SIDE- OKANAGAN MOUNTAIN PROVINCIAL PARK:
SUBMITTED BY: J. HENRY**

On our frequent trips to Kelowna, my eyes are always drawn over the concrete barrier, over the lake, to the rugged bare rock slabs on the other side, dotted with the burnt stumps of trees, no vineyards, no houses, no fences, just wilderness.

Leaving a truck at the Kelowna end, my friend and I took the long drive back to Penticton, Naramata, and to Chute Lake Road. We looked carefully for a trailhead sign, but none was evident. Studying the park map, which I had printed from the internet, we eventually found a narrow dirt road leading up into the forest. Due to erosion, we could only go up about 100 meters before we parked, locked up, and donned our packs. It was already two in the afternoon, and we didn't even know if we were on the right road!

The road improved and soon we reached a proper parking lot complete with an outhouse, picnic table and signage. Now we knew where we were, but where were we going? Goode's Creek campground, a mere 13.5 km away, sounded like a good destination, but wish we had started earlier. We set off down the trail above Chute Creek, still roaring in the spring flood. The burnt tree trunks were widely spaced, and the lower shrubs sprang up all around amid a profusion of flowers. Chocolate Lilies, Meadow Death Camas, and Larkspur lined the trail. Crossing a little rivulet, I heard a rattle and looked up the opposite bank. On the trail was the biggest rattler I have ever seen, at least 140 cm long and pretty mad! But at least, it gave a loud warning. We gave it time to glide off to the shrubbery before continuing.

After a very long day crossing rocky ground through lots of Choke Cherry and Salal bushes, in full flower, we eventually started to drop down toward the Lake. We crossed acres of barren rocky slopes, burnt stumps, and flower meadows surrounded by massive rocky peaks, like an early western movie scenery! My hiking partner was surprised by the addition of eight wood ticks to his person! His explanation was that my passage first, woke them up just in time for them to latch onto his passing.



At Goode's Creek campsite we were greeted by a very large barking dog. A boat moored at the beach by a couple who had taken up all the available space with sunshades, paddleboards, and barbeques. Luckily, a mere hundred yards north was another camp spot on the other side of the creek. In crossing the creek, we noticed that it was black with hundreds of spawning fish, about 20 cms long. Their passage further upstream was deterred because it was too steep and rocky for them to proceed. We set up our tents and quickly cooked supper as it was now 8:30 p.m. and sat on the rocky shore to enjoy the waves and serenity. Amazingly, after the lake grew calm, we could hear the traffic on the highway across the lake. In the morning, I opened my tent door to find that only a few feet away were three Common Mergansers floating by. A lone Canada goose was still floating a little ways off where it had spent the night.

Next day we had a much shorter hike back up the very steep trail then down through a rocky basin to a flat dry meadow. We saw lots of moose scat, but no moose. In the distance we saw a black bear with it's new very tiny cub. Mother bear stood up to look at us and they quickly scurried away amongst the rocks. High above eagles soared around the rocky peaks. From the flat meadow we dropped steeply down to Buchan Bay campground.

We were surprised to see that this trail was once a wagon road? Across the creek was a stone built platform, maybe the remains of a building, and half a dozen old pear and apple trees, even a few lilac bushes in full bloom! What were those settlers thinking, not enough flat land to farm and little timber to log with granite slabs and cliffs all around?

We set up camp and without all the extra weight, we hiked back up and over to Commando Beach. A brass plaque informed us that Chinese Canadian commandos had practiced landings here prior to being sent off to war in the East. All was now deserted except for a pair of Horned Grebes cruising around.



Back at Buchan Bay, we had plenty of time to explore the ruins and the rocky bluffs before supper. After supper, a beaver swam along the lake to within 6 meters of us before slapping his tail and retreating. He stayed around all night and was still there when we left early next morning. Heavy rain started just before dawn and stopped as soon as I got out. We packed up and began the steep climb back to the end of Wildhorse Canyon.

Wildhorse Canyon is a really amazing deep scar through the landscape. The walls tower, often in giant steps of hundred meters with cliffs stacked above each other. The trail, however, was hugely overgrown in places with thick growths of Choke Cherry, Saskatoon, Salal, and Alder. Of course, all the leaves were dripping water, and as we brushed through, we got thoroughly wet. We reached the Rim Trail and left our packs for a quick look. An old, rock-built miners trail angled up, along ledges out of the canyon bottom and (thankfully out of the bush). Reaching open forest, we strolled along a high ridge probably 300 vertical meters above the visible valley bottom trail. A pair of kestrels swooped by below us.

Back down to the trail, carnivorous mosquitoes attacked us through to the end of the canyon. Waving leafy fronds in front of our faces, we emerged, still smiling, into forested parkland above the now visible Lake. We experienced some confusion around the Goode's Basin Junction. There were signs in place, but the trail was washed out in a couple of spots. There was even a camping spot with a nearby creek but no facilities. We finished the trail over open hillside, but encountered a land slip that made the trail disappear down the hill into Deeper Creek. It was easy to cross compared to the bush, mud, washouts, ticks and mosquitos we had already defeated!

Okanagan Mountain Provincial Park was a very interesting park, but in great need of trail work, i.e. brushing out. The scenery, wildlife, and flowers made it all worthwhile to walk on the wild side!

Contributions to the Harlequin are welcome. If you submit a photo, do a write-up to go with it. Please send your submissions to Mary, vffnbc@gmail.com



Chocolate Lily



Common Loon