VFFN Newsletter – Spring 2024

created by Johanna Nott & Jason Lahaie
Visit our website at vffn.ca

Past Outings


Snow Bunting Meadows - Jan 21


Stemwinder Meadows - Feb 18


Radio Tower - March 2


White Lake - April 6


Cinder Cone - May 5

Spring Foraging

submitted by Johanna

Have you noticed the wonderful honey scent emanating from the poplar trees around here? If you don't mind getting sticky fingers, this is the time to harvest those sticky buds of balsam poplar (*populus balsamifera*) to make a salve called Balm of Gilead.

The Salicacea tree family, which the balsam poplar is one of, is the original source ingredient of aspirin. Applied topically, Balm of Gilead is said to relieve pain.

Night Sky

May 23 - frog moon **June 21** - birthing moon/solstice
July 21 - berry moon **August 19** - sturgeon moon

2024 should be a good year for the Persaids Meteor Shower as the moon will set at midnight providing dark skies at peak time August 13th.

Last year a few of us camped overnight at China Ridge to view the Perseids. We plan to do it again this year. Come join us!

Field Notes

submitted by Johanna

Thatching ants (*formica obscuripes*) use surrounding plant material, particularly short pieces of dry grass and pine needles, to build their large nests. These nest mounds can become almost a metre tall if built around an old stump and extend a metre or so underground with subterranean tunnels.

A colony is intiated by one mated queen. She finds a sunny location, rears the first batch of workers to maturity and ever after is cared for as she focuses on egg-laying. The mound is a boiling swarm of activity made up of 100's of thousands of worker ants, foraging for food and building material. It is fascinating to watch them but not too close as they bite!

Ants produce formic acid that they can spray as an anti-predator mechanism, so even a foraging bear will quit digging up a nest after it has had enough formic acid sprayed up its nose. Some birds use these chemical secretions to their benefit by 'ant bathing' to rid themselves of parasites in their feathers and on their bodies.

Ants are a beneficial insect that catch huge quantities of other insect pests. They scavenge on dead animal remains, helping to clean up the environment, as well as aerate the soil, promoting water absorption. They are an integral part of the ecosystem.

In the garden, plants that repel ants are lavender, mint, basil, thyme, oregano and eucalyptus. These plants all contain linalool which is an effective repellant.

Earth Day Cormack Marsh - April 20

Our dedicated VFFN members did a terrific cleanup job at Cormack Marsh this year as in years past. Two trails were thoroughly eradicated of weeds as well as the area around the info kiosk and the gully behind it. It shows how a few hours of volunteers' work can make such a difference. Kudos.

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Meadow Lark Festival - May 17-20

Submitted by John & Mary

We had two great days hosting a total of 37 guests on the Friday and the Monday of the Meadowlark Festival. On Friday we greeted 18 participants with coffee and cookies at the Princeton Museum, before car pooling and travelling to Swan Lake. All eighteen guests walked around to the Noon Blind and then via Bear Trail back to their vehicles. We saw mountain bluebirds in their brilliant colours to the utter amazement of those who had never seen them before. Kestrels, a red tailed hawk, ruddy ducks, cinnamon teal and lots of other species were also seen. The weather was perfect!

On Monday, we again met at the museum for our Trip to the Eocene. Most visitors were absolutely blown away by the exhibits at the museum, and not just the fossils. As a special treat John took half the group at a time to the basement archives so they could get a grasp of all the drawers of fabulous specimens. Then we drove to the fossil beds down Black Mine road. People scattered all over, picking up lots of interesting stuff. All of which was first shown to John to ensure no valuable specimens escaped the museum's grasp! Then we had another short drive to a small site where everyone was assured of a find! The group was so enthusiastic, John was begged to repeat the experience in the future. A great day was had by all. Thanks again to the museum for their cooperation, and of course, to Mary for handling all the refreshments, paperwork and even sweeping…the group, not the trails!

Participants viewing Swan Lake

Participants looking for fossils

Hoary Elfin

Cornell Bird Nest Article

by Robyn Bailey

Finding a bird's nest offers a rare chance to discreetly witness the intricacies of breeding bird biology. But birds have spent millions of years evolving ways to hide their nests from onlookers—so it takes skill to find these camouflaged gems.

But take heart—if you have birds around your house, and even just a little bit of habitat such as shrubs or trees, birds are probably nesting near you. And if you start to think like a nesting bird, you can tune in to their behavior.

Read the full article at:
https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/top-three-signs-that-birds-are-nesting-near-you

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Native Bee Study Group

The Native Bee Study group is happening on June 26, 2024, 7:00 p.m. – 8:30 p.m. PDT. This group is an opportunity for connecting and learning about native bees with others throughout the province. We will have a theme each month, and will use this as a jumping off point to share our own knowledge and learn from others. Experts and complete beginners welcome! It will be a show and tell format, and anyone who is interested in participating can create a slide on the shared google slides deck to share with the group (link sent with registration). Photos can also be sent to bcnativebees@gmail.com with a subject line of "Native Bee Study Group"

Meadowlark Festival Butterfly Excursion - May 17

by Sue Elwell

On Friday of the Meadlowlark Festival, Sue Elwell with the assistance of Shirley Morrison led a butterfly excursion on Black Mine Road. Since the day was forecast to be partially sunny (butterflies need to see their shadows), everyone set off with great anticipation. Sue with her laptop gave a mini presentation of what butterflies had recently been seen in the area. Unfortunately the day just got worse but with luck a probable Silvery Blue was seen and then a Hoary Elfin was seen and photographed. During the nearly three hours much information was shared which was greatly appreciated by all and one couple said they might return next year. One participant who was spending Monday with Dick Cannings doing a Big Bird Count, was able to get three lifers in Sue's backyard (birds).