

# *THE OSPREY*

NEWSLETTER OF THE WEST KOOTENAY NATURALISTS' ASSOCIATION



Cover photos by Peter McIver

# WKNA OFFICERS 2021-2022



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**FIELD TRIPS**

Contact the field trip director for information on trips and meetings. If you do not have email, contact the field trip director for hard copy updates.

**DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSIONS**

The deadline for the next newsletter is **FEBRUARY 15, 2023**. Material accepted by the Editor any time up to this date. We reserve the right to edit for space, clarity, spelling, and syntax. Major changes will be discussed with the contributor.



# FIELD TRIPS

## \*Just a Reminder\*

1. Common courtesy and common sense dictates that you inform the contact person to confirm your attendance at an event or program, AND THAT YOU CONTACT TO CANCEL if you later find that you cannot attend. Nothing is written in stone and changes may have to be made from time to time, due to weather conditions or personal reasons. Do not wait until the last minute to contact if you are interested in any of our events as leaders may have already left, especially if camping or long distances are involved.

2. The leader of an outing is responsible for:

- Getting the appropriate waiver form signed by every person attending. There are TWO waivers - one for all attendees and one for guests (one-day membership + \$2). Print/photocopy the guest waiver beforehand and keep extra copies just in case. Forward member waiver/sign-out sheets to Diane White, and day membership forms and accompanying dollars to Paula Neilson immediately.
- Making sure that no one is left behind with car trouble at the parking area, especially in winter.
- Arranging to have the trip report forwarded to the newsletter editor. The leader may delegate this, of course. The writer also has the obligation to get the report submitted BY THE DEADLINE.

3. Make it a policy with the entire group to keep the person behind you in sight. If your follower on the trail is lagging, slow your pace to keep that person in sight. If everyone in the group continually checks to make sure they can see the person behind them, it is impossible for anyone to get into serious trouble. If you split into groups, do not allow any one person to "take off" by him/herself.

4. NO PETS allowed on any of our outings.

**Do you have any suggestions for outings, speakers, projects, or improvements to the Club?  
Contact a member of the Executive!**

**May 4, 2022**

Me deAnna Ponds Hike

The weather was iffy as usual this year but it didn't stop seven keen WKNats from doing this beautiful and quite easy walk. It never did rain. We had lunch at the south shelter, then 6 of us took a rough side trail to over look the Columbia River and Champion Flats. We also could see South Castlegar, Blueberry Creek and Fairview.

- Hazel & Ed Beynon



Early Spring scene at Mel deAnna Pond

# TRIP REPORTS



Top Left: Columbia River Overview

Top Right: Canada Goose on her nest which is built on floating material in the pond

Bottom Left: Blooming Kinnikinnick

Bottom Right: The gang beside blooming Saskatoon bushes



# TRIP REPORTS

**August 28, 2022**

Twin Peaks Hike

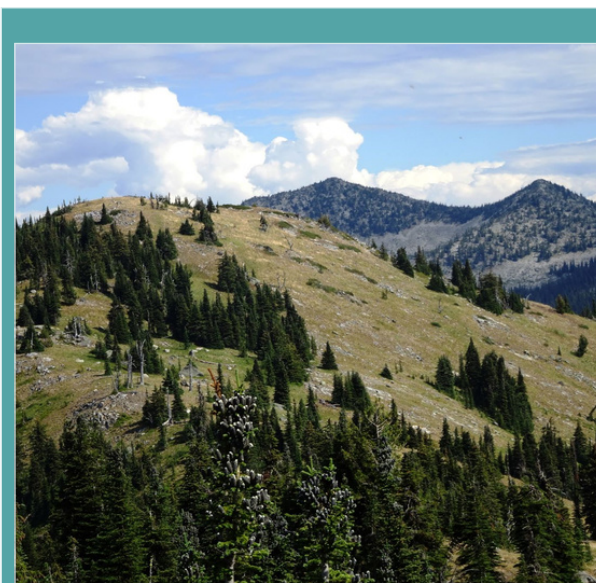
Twin Peaks are some of the easiest mountains to climb in the Castlegar area as the route is primarily over open ground covered with grasses and other low plants. The elevation gain to the highest peak from the road is about 350 metres (about 1000 feet). The higher of the two peaks is called "Grassy 4" on Google Earth and it is where we ate lunch with gorgeous views all around us.

Seven of us made the hike.

- Hazel & Ed Beynon



View towards Castlegar and Lower Arrow Lake from ridge between peaks



Left: Second Peak from First Peak with Mount Siwash in the background

Right: Group picture

# TRIP REPORTS

**September 30, 2022**

Hawkwatch

Even though the weather forecast predicted that our weather would clear by about mid morning it didn't clear until around noon and that is when the migrating hawks started showing up along the ridge above the hawkwatch site. Michael thanks the attendees for their wit and good humour in the meantime. Fortunately there were ravens soaring high above to distract us.

Michael counted from 10 am to 2 pm plus 2:30 pm to 5 pm.  
Birds Counted were:

Turkey Vulture	5
Osprey	1
Sharp-shinned Hawk	24
Cooper's Hawk	4
Red-tailed Hawk	24
Bald Eagle	4
Unidentified Buteo	1
Unidentified Accipters	5

Broad-winged Hawks and Turkey Vultures have normally all gone south by the end of September.

The photo to the right is part of the ridge that migrating hawks and eagles soar and glide along. Energy from the sun heats the rock and creates updrafts. Basically, migrating raptors use updrafts to soar to a great height and then glide to the next updraft where it again gains elevation and glides to another updraft on their journey south or north depending on the season.



Migrating Red-tailed hawk soaring. The wings of a gliding hawk are swept back a bit and the tail is often almost closed



# TRIP REPORTS

Some of the more powerful falcons don't bother to use updrafts, they just fly north or south without soaring or gliding. Raptors are usually seen moving above the ridge at about 1/2 km from the observer or even farther although sometimes the birds can be much closer. A telescope is very useful for observing migrating raptors.

Hawk watching can be very pleasant because most hawks and eagles want updrafts before they start to move and that means there is warm sun while you are waiting to see them. It can also be a very social time while waiting for hawks to appear. Once a raptor is spotted all eyes are in the sky. See photo. (The white truck was abandoned at the Hawkwatch site.)



Michael was watching hawks again on October 7, here is what he saw:

Osprey	1
Northern Harrier	1
Sharp-shinned Hawk	5
Red-tailed Hawk	2
( including a Harlan's Hawk)	
Golden Eagle	1
Bald Eagle	2

\*Also 2 unidentified Buteos

Trip led by Michael Mcmann.

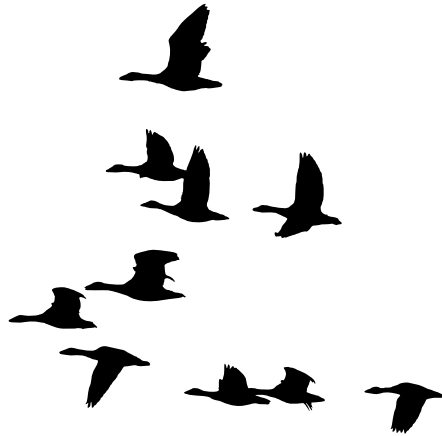
- Hazel & Ed Beynon

# WEST KOOTENAY NATURALISTS 'EVOLUTION'

BY BILL MERILEES

During the early 1960's the Province of British Columbia began planning a system of Regional Colleges to serve the 'rural' regions of British Columbia. Selkirk College, at Castlegar, was the first college to open its doors.

The first classes were held in the bunk houses, but in the spring of 1967 (?), with the construction of the campus overlooking the junction of the Kootenay and Columbia Rivers, Selkirk, as we know it today, was formally opened. This was an exciting time for students, faculty and staff. Many of the faculty were recruited from outside the West Kootenay which, when compared to a university environment, offered interesting challenges.



The idea of a natural history group evolved slowly. Its beginning can be attributed to a press release to the newspapers in Nelson, Castlegar, and Trail, in October 1968 that Bill Merilees of the Biology Department was looking for participants to document the bird fauna of the West Kootenay area. The first respondent was Maurice Ellison of Trail, who said he had been recording the arrival of birds near his home in Trail since 1939! Via questionnaires, participants were asked to record their seasonal bird observations. Slowly the cadre of participants grew. In 1971, Selkirk College offered an evening 'natural history' course that attracted more than 100 participants. Weekend field

trips were included. College faculty, Lesley Anderton (geology), and Peter Wood (entomology) assisted along with guest speakers from U.B.C. (Dr. Ian McTaggart Cowan) and Dr. Murray Newman (Vancouver Public Aquarium). 'Bug and Beer' nights were a great hit! In 1972, with the encouragement of Elton Anderson, President of the Federation of B.C. Naturalists, the West Kootenay Naturalist Association was formed. Bill Merilees was the WKNA's first president.

From 1972 to the present, our association has offered a varied natural history program to its members and the public. Our newsletter, now known as "The Osprey", has wonderfully documented many of these activities, member's interests and accomplishments.





# PILEATED HI-RISE

BY JAMIE BASTEDO

Handiwork of a Pileated woodpecker showing the characteristically rectangular excavations used for insect foraging and nest cavities. The greyish edges of the holes and lack of fresh chips at the base of this tree suggest they were drilled some time ago. These holes are often so extensive and so deep they can hasten the collapse of dead and dying trees. While standing, such "high-rise" trees offer crucial shelter to many species such as other woodpeckers, nuthatches, swifts, owls, ducks, bats, and martens.

The photo of this seriously pecked cedar tree was taken along the west shore of Violin Lake, due south of Trail near the U.S border. For more information on this delightful but unsung trail, see the following link. The gate and reservoir dam referred to in this description have since been removed and an innovative wetland restoration project is underway.

<https://trailpeak.com/trails/violin-lake-near-trail-bc-5944>



# DISCOVERY AND ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CASTLEGAR OUTDOOR EDUCATION AREA

BY BILL MERILEES

In October of 1971, as my Pacific Western Airlines flight from Vancouver approached the Castlegar Airport from the south, I spotted a series of ponds high on a plateau directly across the Columbia River from Blueberry Creek. Intrigued by this feature, I chatted with a number of students during a Biology lab at Selkirk College, one being Mary Ann Deanna. To my surprise, she mentioned that her father Mel, hunted grouse in this area.

In some ways the rest of this story is 'history'. I contacted Mel. We scrambled up the hillside from the Castlegar Dump, via a series of bear trails, where we located a number of beaver ponds. These ponds were incredible! So impressive in fact, that I talked 'pilot' Dr. Peter Wood into taking me for a flight over the area. From above we got a much better appreciation of their considerable extent and diversity! From this point onwards, Mel and I became close friends!

Impressed by this system of ponds prompted me to propose to the Castlegar School District

(Claude Bissell & John Dascher and later Colin Pryce) and the recently formed West Kootenay Naturalists Association, that this area would make a very good outdoor nature education 'classroom'. Together, we made a formal request to the Ministry of Lands in Nelson to have this area formally designated as a U.R.E.P. (Crown Land protected for the Use, Recreation and Enjoyment of the Public). This status was granted and the Castlegar Outdoor Education Area came into being. Note: In 1992 the Mel Deanna Trail was formally designated as a recreation trail under the Forest and Range Practices Act of B.C.

About this same time (1970), a number of government funded, student employment programs (Opportunities for Youth (OFY), Katimavik, and others) came into being. Selkirk College students, in particular led by Keith and Johanna Baldwin, taking advantage of these opportunities, considerably improved the access trail and constructed two shelters for student outdoor education use. Selkirk College faculty were also very helpful in transporting building materials for shelter construction.

With the completion of the Castlegar-Salmo Highway in 1978, the 'viewpoint' parking lot became the starting point for the trail leading into the marsh. Further reconnaissance of the area by the naturalist community, revealed a number of interesting features. One being that this wetland was largely held in place by one or two strategically located beaver dams - and - that there was an old abandoned mining prospect on site!

Sadly, Mel DeAnna passed away unexpectedly in 1978. The trail he pioneered has fittingly been named in his honour!

The Castlegar Outdoor Education Area is an incredible community asset, and a unique West Kootenay natural history destination for those wishing to enjoy the outdoors and the quiet appreciation of nature.

Acknowledgement: I would like to thank Justin Dexter, Recreation Officer, Kootenay Boundary District, BC Forest Service, for his assistance in the preparation of this article.



# SOME OBSERVATIONS FROM MY 2022 WANDERINGS...

BY PETER MCIVER

## "Two Fishers Near the Brilliant Bridge"

On July 3 I saw what I later recognised as 2 Fishers cross the road from the river side and climb up the bank near the Fortis gate close to the Brilliant Bridge over the Kootenay River. The animals were both very dark, almost black, and small dog sized, but long and slim with long bushy tails and short and kind of bow shaped legs. A bit smaller than the Wolverines I have seen, much longer tails, and unicoloured. Although observed from a car, they were very close and seen well. I stopped of course hoping to get photos but had no luck.

I had not realised they occurred here, believing them to be denizens of northern forests but an internet search revealed that there are small populations in northern Washington state, so they could either be from there, or a local population that has not been reported.

## "Flying Squirrels and Bluebird Boxes"

I maintain and periodically monitor 23 Bluebird Boxes in the Champion Flats/ Blagodatnoe area. The boxes are scattered among the meadows and trees and Gary Lelliot, I believe, constructed and monitored the original boxes 20 or more years ago. Last year 4 boxes were occupied by Northern Flying Squirrels, and this year there were 7, not the same boxes except for one, occupied by these cute creatures. I evict them at this time of year, but leave them in the spring when they have young. I have two bluebird sized boxes in my Kinnaird property and both were occupied by the squirrels. The animals do not leave the boxes when opened. {Four of the boxes were occupied by Bluebirds, and none destroyed by bears, which last year following the heat dome destroyed 5, probably seeking carcasses}

## "Swallows"

I was reticent to report this observation, because I can guess what you might think. However, maybe others thinking the same way is maybe why I can find no other instances of this odd sighting. I observed from a distance of only about 10 meters, a Barn Swallow exiting a Tree Swallow box. I am totally certain of the species, it stayed around for a while, but did not re-enter the box. A Tree Swallow exited the box a minute or two later. I can find no reports of hybridisation between these two species though there are reports of Barn Swallow hybridisation with the Cave Swallow and the Eurasian House Martin, both species, like the Barn Swallow, construct mud nests.



**"Some Thoughts on the Bird App, Merlin"**

Like many others, I am super impressed with this app, which must however be used with caution. I think it is a wonderful way to engage people with birds and I am sure will help many to enjoy birding even more.

The problem of course is that birdsong and calls are not consistent, with many overlaps, and the app does not have access to all the other clues like habitat, likely occurrence in a particular area etc that is instinctual to an experienced birder-by-ear.

My hearing is compromised and I have done nearly all of my

birding by sight, so in many ways this app was a revelation. It is gratifying to have ID's confirmed by the app, and it also identifies individuals I can not hear {as well as frustratingly sometimes giving no ID for ones I can identify}. While it makes mistakes not infrequently, it does show whether the bird is currently being reported within 20km by ebird, using the "Explore Birds" function. Using a good date specific checklist like Gary Davidson's or Linda VanDamme's for Creston can also be helpful.

I love it when the app consistently comes up with an unexpected bird that I can not hear, in a particular location.

Examples include a Saw-whet Owl at a beach on the Slocan river, House Sparrow from my yard in Castlegar-never seen one there, but a few live on a bench above my place and only 200 metres from my place as the voice travels. It reported a Caspian Tern from my yard, bizarrely unlikely, but I live on the bank of the Columbia, and the app does not know that. In early summer it was frequently reporting Hermit Thrushes at low elevation when I was hearing only Swainson's. But maybe I am missing them and they are waiting for the snow to leave the mountains. So lots of fun as long as you don't treat the results as gospel {Did I really write that?}.



Left: Vesper Sparrow  
Right: American Redstart

# THE PERSONALLY NARRATED, AUDUBON WILDLIFE FILMS

BY BILL MERILEES

Few WKNA members will remember Selkirk College sponsoring the National Audubon Society's wildlife film program? This program that sent wildlife photographers around Canada and the United States to personally present their work, began in 1943. In the mid 1970's, just as the West Kootenay Naturalists were in their formative stages, Selkirk College sponsored (in partnership with the WKNA?) one or two seasons of these presentations. Top notch

filmmakers would travel from one community to another and personally narrate their productions to live audiences. Tom Sterling and Richard Kurz were among the presenters, I can recall.

This program came to an end due to improvements to colour television, smaller audiences and increasing travel costs.

As a teenager and member of the Vancouver Natural History Society (who sponsored this

film program for many years) I really looked forward to these well attended presentations.

The facilities at Selkirk College were not the best venue for these programs but they offered, all-be-it short term, an interesting diversity to West Kootenay 'entertainment'.

From a provincial perspective, Chess Lyon and Bristol Foster were two British Columbians who were 'regulars' for many years on the National Audubon Society's, personally presented wildlife documentaries.



Left: Lazulli Bunting



Right: Clay-coloured Sparrow (photos by Peter McIver)