

# *The Osprey*

NEWSLETTER OF THE WEST KOOTENAY NATURALISTS'  
ASSOCIATION

#2-809 MILL ST. NELSON BC V1L 4S8



Record Ridge - Brian Deon



Beargrass Ridge - Diane White



Mt. Plewman - Alison Etter



Great Horned Owl - Alistair Fraser

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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 **MAY 1**. 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.

**A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR**

Thank you for welcoming me as the new editor for The Osprey! I look forward to learning from you all and sharing your stories, photos, and ideas through this newsletter.

-Suzy Christoffel



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**BIRD COUNTS; WKNA,  
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# SPHINX MOTHS OF THE KOOTENAYS

BY JANICE ARNDT

The sphinxes are a family of relatively large moths that show an interesting range of shapes, patterns and life histories. Some are colourful, but many are varying shades of grey or brown. Because of their robust bodies, rapid wing beats, and habit of hovering at flowers while feeding on nectar, some species are also called hummingbird moths.



*Hemaris thetis*

Of the nearly 20 sphinx moths found in BC, I have seen and photographed nine. Below are three found in our area to give an idea of their diversity. The best time to watch for these moths is May through July.

Rocky Mountain Clearwing (*Hemaris thetis*) is a day-flying moth that can be seen nectaring at a variety of ornamental and wild flowers, including lilac (*Syringa spp.*) and dogbane (*Apocynum spp.*). It is most abundant in May and June, but the accompanying photo was taken when my butterfly bush (*Buddleia*) began to bloom in late July. Though the wings of *Hemaris* moths are scaled when they first emerge from the pupa, most of the scales fall off soon after, leaving large clear sections.

Southwestern Eyed Sphinx (*Smerinthus ophthalmica*) is common in our area and can sometimes be found at porch lights that have been left on overnight. It is representative of a number of species that have a subdued forewing pattern and striking eyespots on the hind wings. When a moth at rest quickly spreads its wings to reveal the eyespots, the effect is believed to startle potential predators, such as birds. These moths don't feed as adults; all their nutritional requirements are obtained by the caterpillars, which are found on willow (*Salix spp.*).



*Smerinthus ophthalmica*

Vashti Sphinx (*Sphinx vashti*) is a member of a group of moths with primarily nocturnal habits. The adults are about the size of swallowtail butterflies and are infrequently observed. While a Vashti Sphinx might occasionally come to a porch light, chances of seeing this species are increased with the use of a UV/black light. The caterpillars feed on snowberry (*Symphoricarpos spp.*).



*Sphinx vashti*

# TRIP REPORTS

## \*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 + \$1). 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!**

### July 1 & 3, 2020

Bird Walks on Brilliant Flats and Waldie Is.

Bird walks were held on July 1st and 3rd with group sizes of 6 members each. July 1st was a cool windy day and a number of birds were seen but the highlight of the trip was a family of river otters playing in one of the sewage lagoons. July 3rd was a more pleasant day and more birds were seen or heard than on the 1st. Also, like July 1st, the highlight of the walk was in the sewage lagoons and this time it was a long line of painted turtles basking on a log in the sun. Unfortunately part of the Waldie Is. Trail was flooded by high water in the river so we were unable to fully walk that trail.



July 3 Group - Bird Walks



A Flicker Family - Bird Walks



Male Brown-headed Cowbirds - Bird Walks



**Combined Bird List:** Turkey Vulture, Canada Goose, American Widgeon, Mallard, Common Goldeneye, Common Merganser, Osprey, Bald Eagle, American Kestrel, Spotted Sandpiper, Vaux's Swift, Calliope Hummingbird, Northern Flicker, Willow Flycatcher, Pacific Slope Flycatcher, Eastern Kingbird, Shrike Sp., Red-Eyed Vireo, Steller's Jay, American Crow, Violet-Green Swallow, Northern Rough-Winged Swallow, Black-Capped Chickadee, Veery, American Robin, Gray Catbird, European Starling, Cedar Waxwing, Yellow Warbler, American Redstart, Common Yellowthroat, Western Tanager, Lazuli Bunting, Spotted Towhee, Chipping Sparrow, Vesper Sparrow, Red-Winged Blackbird, Western Meadowlark, Brown-Headed Cowbird, Bullock's Oriole, House Finch, and Pine Siskin.

- Ed Beynon



Painted Turtles - Bird Walks



Spotted Sandpiper - Bird Walks



Tough Limber Pine - Twin Peaks

**July 9, 2020**

Hike up Twin Peaks

The mosquitoes were horrendous but the scenery was wonderful. Glacier Lilies and Shooting Stars were still

blooming but the main flower show hasn't started yet. The two photos of the limber pine trees shown how resilient these trees are. The "Will to Live" shows an ancient tree that is still partially living, and "Tough Limber Pine" had lost its top many years ago but the tree is still looking healthy. Limber trees are endangered due to climate change and the pine beetle. A family of blue grouse was beside our path on the way down and the photo shows Moma keeping an eye on us. We had a great trip in spite of cool windy weather and the mosquitoes. We just got back to the truck when it started to pour rain.

- Hazel & Ed Beynon



Twin Snags - Twin Peaks



Moma Blue Grouse - Twin Peaks



Will to Live - Twin Peaks



Snow in July - Twin Peaks



**July 13, 2020**

Hike to Record Ridge

We did a recce to Record Ridge on July 11 to see if the bitterroot (*Lewisia rediviva*) was blooming yet, and found three different rocky areas where they were blooming. Not being certain if the flowers would last another week, and since our co-leader had to leave the area on the 14th, we decided that the hike had to take place on July 13th. In spite of the very short notice, eleven members were still able to come on this hike. Due to the Covid-19 rules, we could have no more than 6 people in our group so our co-leader, Brian Deon, led the rest of the group.

After passing through Rossland, we drove up the old Cascade Highway about 12 km to the Seven Summits Trail parking area and then we followed the trail in a northerly direction. It took us about one and a half hours to reach our destination as we were stopping frequently to look at plants and birds. As well as the spectacular bitterroot, there were numerous other flowers blooming. The silver-leafed phacelia was especially popular with the bumble bees. We were also lucky to see a mother blue grouse who posed for us while photos were taken. As we moved on past her we saw one of her chicks, that had been

hiding in the tall grass, fly away from us. The second group saw one of the chicks but not the mother. The scenery was delightful and the weather was good for hiking- not too hot. Leaders for Group 1 were Ed and Hazel Beynon, leader for Group 2 was Brian Deon.

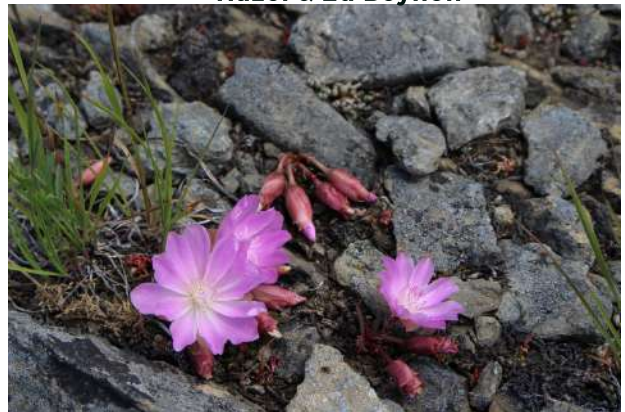
Some of the flowers seen along the trail were; delphinium, lupin, slender hawksbeard, silverleaf phacelia, stone crop, timber milk vetch, thread-leaved sandwort, and yellow monkey flower.

Some of the birds seen or heard were; Olive-sided Flycatcher, Blue Grouse (Dusky), Cassin's Finch, Hermit thrush, Clark's Nutcracker, American Kestrel, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Mountain Chickadee and Western Tanager.

- Hazel & Ed Beynon



Group 1 - Record Ridge - by Brian Deon



*Lewisia rediviva* - Record Ridge - by Brian Deon



Group 2 - Record Ridge - by Ed Beynon



Finding Flowers - Record Ridge - by Brian Deon



**July 22, 2020**

**Hike to first Twin Peak and Beargrass Ridge**

We had done a recce a few days before the trip and saw that the beargrass bloom was at its peak and would soon start deteriorating so we decided to lead this hike as soon as possible. Eleven people signed up for the hike but two were unable to come. On our way up to the first Twin Peak the group was delighted to see many varieties of flowers blooming. The visibility was very good so we could see mountains in all directions. On our way down a bird flew out from between one of the leaders feet and we found a junco nest with 5 eggs right where we were walking.

Once we were back to the vehicles, we drove another kilometer up the road and then hiked about another kilometer along a ridge which ran towards Grassy Mountain. This is where there was a spectacular bloom of beargrass. People spread out and found their own little niche to eat lunch and enjoy the scenes.

Due to Covid restrictions a group of 5 naturalists was led by Ed and 4 more were led by Hazel. The leaders wish to thank all the participants for making this a very enjoyable hike.

**-Hazel & Ed Beynon**



The Valhallas - Beargrass Ridge - Diane White



Fleabane Scene - Beargrass Ridge - Diane White



Looking West'ish' - Beargrass Ridge - Herb Hess



Junco Nest - Beargrass Ridge - Diane White Hiking Up - Beargrass Ridge - Ed Beynon



**October 3, 2020**

Hike to Mt. Plewman

We were fortunate to have a bright, sunny day with low wind and not much smoke. Eight of us drove to Strawberry Pass in 5 vehicles. Some shuffling of passengers occurred along the way and we made the final climb to Sunspot Cabin with two vehicles. We parked there and broke into two groups, to comply with Covid-19 requirements, and hiked the Seven Summits Trail about 7km to the top of Mt Plewman. The elevation gain was about 1500 feet. As we gained elevation the leaves of the huckleberry bushes changed colour from green at lower elevations to brilliant red as we approached the peak. Most flowering plants were in seed but some lupines were still blooming near the top of Mt Plewman. We had a leisurely, socially distanced lunch at the summit enjoying the scenery and each others company. Some migrating raptors were seen moving between us and Old Glory as they travelled south. Leaders were Ed and Hazel Beynon.

Birds seen and/or heard were - Sharp-shinned Hawk, Red-tailed Hawks, Kestrel, American Pipit, Yellow-rumped Warblers, Canada (Gray) Jays, and Horned Larks.

**-Hazel & Ed Beynon**



Mt. Plewman - Hazel Beynon



Mt. Plewman - Hazel Beynon



Panoramic View - Mt. Plewman - Alison Etter



# NELSON NATUREKIDS CLUB 2020 ACTIVITY REPORT

TEXT BY JENNI STOL, PHOTOS BY JENNI STOL AND JAIME MACGIBBON

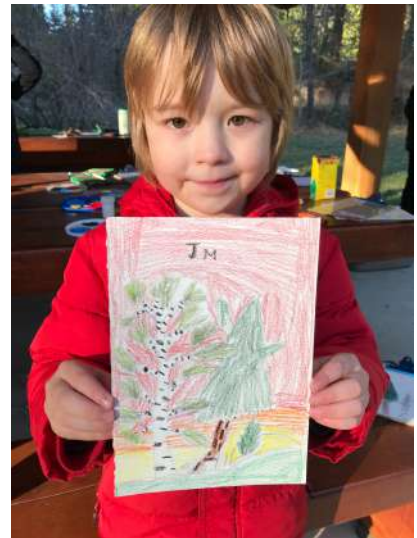
2020 was a year of change for the Nelson NatureKids club. We started the year strong, gathering with our member families to enjoy a fun snowshoeing adventure and to play and learn about winter survival, aided by local environmental educators Shanon Bennett and Malin Christensson. We were looking forward to another full year of exciting “Explorer Day” programs led by community nature mentors, as well as celebrating NatureKids’ 20th anniversary by joining with clubs across BC in a large tree-planting initiative.

Then COVID changed everything, and we suspended all our in-person programming, which has always been the heart of our mission as an organization. Thanks to our amazing group of staff and volunteers, we were able to adapt to the change and quickly began offering online content and resources for families to explore nature on their own. Our virtual Explorer Days allowed kids from across BC to participate in interactive discussions with experts in



topics such as frog conservation, birding, marine mammals, and bats.

We are very thankful to the educators who led these sessions and to all the kids who joined in and were always full of great questions! NatureKids developed COVID safety protocols that allowed us to begin offering small in-person events again starting in the summer. The Nelson club enjoyed a fun afternoon learning about wetlands and water stewardship with the Friends of Kootenay Lake Stewardship Society, and in the fall we were able to celebrate our 20th anniversary by planting around 100 trees, generously donated by PRT tree nursery. →



We finished our 2020 programming on a sunny November afternoon creating beautiful works of nature-inspired art at Crescent Valley Regional Park.



As we move into 2021, we continue to navigate the provincial health orders while fulfilling our mission to connect families with nature across our province. We will continue to offer virtual events that are free and open to all BC families, and we hope to hold in-person events for our club members as well.

Our club relies on volunteer nature mentors to lead our events and share their knowledge and enthusiasm for the natural world with the next generation of nature stewards. If you are able to volunteer your time, please contact club leader Jenni Stol at **nelson@naturekidsbc.ca**. Opportunities are available to mentor events in and around Nelson, as well as to help with club leadership and participate in virtual events.



*About NatureKids BC*

Established in 2000 and originally called the Young Naturalists Club of BC, NatureKids BC has grown into a broad network of nature clubs for families across the province. The network helps children ages 5-12 get outdoors to explore, play, learn about and take action for nature, engaging in citizen science initiatives and environmental stewardship activities. To learn more, please visit **www.naturekidsbc.ca**.





# A CREST IS A DRAG

BY ALISTAIR FRASER

Kenn Kaufman is an American naturalist known for his perceptive field guides to North American birds. In June, 2020, he posted an article for Audubon about crested birds. In it, he made an interesting observation:

*crested birds, in general, are not long-distance migrants.*

However, when it came to explaining why migrant birds generally lack crests, Mr. Kaufman said: "As far as I can tell, it's just coincidence".

I don't believe it is a coincidence. I believe that there is a simple explanation why migrants generally eschew crests.

First, what is a bird crest? On birds, which have them, crests are feathers extending upwards from a bird's head. Different configurations might be named crest, hood, horn, or ears. But, for our purposes all of these behave as crests.

Only a few birds sport crests. A bird with a crest can raise or lower it, but will raise (erect) it to communicate aggression or sexual arousal. While a crest is sometimes lowered (collapsed) on a perched or floating bird, the crest always seems to be collapsed on a flying bird.



*Crests, on birds that have them, are feathers extending from a bird's head. Different configurations might be named crest, hood, horns, or ears. This is a female Hooded Merganser (04/27/2014)*

The reason a bird would collapse a crest when flying is fairly obvious: an erect crest during flight would produce extra aerodynamic drag. This would make flying more arduous and induce the bird's head to tip upward, problems easily avoided by collapsing the crest.

The issue is well known in the aircraft industry where the role of the crest takes the form of a spoiler. This is a device, usually on the wings, that can be lifted to intentionally reduce the lift by spoiling the flow.

It took me a long time before I noticed the pattern whereby a crested bird systematically collapses its crest during flight. Why was this pattern so difficult to spot?

- First, much of the difficulty seems to come from the problem of spotting a behavioural negative: a crest not erected. Indeed, the literature on a bird's crest seems to concentrate on occasions when crested birds show them - not when they systematically do not.
- Second, even collecting evidence of a crested bird's appearance during flight is difficult merely because the photography is difficult. Evidence for this is easily obtained with a web search of the image of a small bird. The fraction showing flight is small.

Given these difficulties, my small sample, below, can only be suggestive of a consistent behaviour of flying with crest lowered.

Granted, the crest is not always displayed even when the bird is perched or moving slowly, but I shall show pictures when it is. Then I shall show pictures of the bird flying, a time when I have never seen a crest deployed.

I start with the Great Horned Owl, the bird where I first recognized the behaviour, but not the broader pattern. The horns are merely the owl's





crests, which seem always to be deployed except during flight. A perched owl displays its horns, but then flying, the owl collapses its horns.



Unlike the Great Horned Owl, the Double-crested Cormorant only shows crests briefly during breeding season. Two white crests are seen in the first picture, but even though the second picture shows aggression, because the cormorant is flying, the crests are collapsed. Taken together, the owl and cormorant prompted me to look through my pictures for other examples. I found none where a crested bird hadn't collapsed it during flight.



The Belted Kingfisher frequently has its crest erected when perched, but not always. I have seen it fly many times but always with its crest flattened (next picture).



Both male and female Hooded Mergansers erect crests in response to sexual arousal. However, even when flying together, the crests are flattened. →





The Steller's Jay is rarely seen without its large crest erected. That is, until it flies.



Both the Bohemian and Cedar Waxwings raise their crests only occasionally. But, when flying, each has it lowered. I illustrate this with perched Cedar Waxwings and a flying Bohemian, although I could have done it the other way around.



My final illustration is particularly interesting as it requires three pictures to discuss. First is a female Common Merganser with her chicks. She has a raised crest. The second shows both a female and male flying with crests lowered. Finally, birds planing is another time where speed is needed and so the crest is lowered to reduce drag.



There appears to be a consistent pattern here: when crested birds need speed, they lower their crests to minimize aerodynamic drag.

Back to the matter of migrating birds. During flight, an erected crest is a drag and so is lowered. Migration is one very long flight. None of this is to say that crested birds don't migrate, anymore than it is to say they don't fly. Indeed, many of the birds illustrated migrate. Mr. Kaufman only claimed that "crested birds, in general, are not long-distance migrants". It seems not coincidental that during migration, birds without crests have an advantage of both less drag and less weight.

