

Society of Grassland Naturalists
Minutes of General Meeting – April 28, 2015
Police Point Park

1. **Call to Order:** 7:07 pm. Dave McKenzie – Chair; Anne Bernhardt – acting Secretary.
2. **Review and Adoption of Minutes of General meeting February 24, 2015: Motion carried.**
3. **Exciting Sightings:** Sightings from members – Leaf Cutter Bees, Yellow Rump Warbler, Meadowlarks and Robbins.
4. **Treasurer’s Report:** Eileen away. Anne reported from GN Board meeting on April 7, 2015 - Total GN club: \$23,030.48; Interpretive Program: \$72,502.55. Membership 96.
5. **Priority Business:**
 - a. **Elected Executive at AGM March 24, 2015:**
 - President – Dave McKenzie
 - Vice President – Hugh Armstrong
 - Secretary – Betty Rainville
 - Treasurer – Eileen Cowtan
 - Past President (appointed) – Anne Bernhardt
 - b. **Directors-at-Large** appointed at Board Meeting April 7, 2015: Gary Martin and Wendy Fayad-Dennis* (*later declined).
 - c. **Standing Committees and Projects:** Contact persons notified to call meetings to select chair and draft budget.
 - d. **External Representative to Nature Alberta:** Mike O’Shea and Martha Munz Gue as alternative.
6. **Interpretive Program Report:** Corlaine Gardner reported that the Easter event was very successful with 5100 people in attendance at the Nature Centre. Always welcome more volunteers. Upcoming events as listed in the April Chronicle.
7. **Committee Reports:**
 - a. **Indoor Program** – Dave McKenzie: tonight’s presentation “Ferruginous Hawks in Southern Alberta” by Janet Ng, PhD Candidate, Dept Biological Science, U of A. May 26, Ian & Angela Turner on “Walking Tour of Northern England”.
 - e. **Field Trips:** no report.
 - f. **Fundraising:** no report.
 - g. **Bird Tales Project:** no report.
 - h. **Birding Trails Project:** Milt Spitzer mentioned that the group is waiting for Phil Horch to return and call a meeting.
8. **Other Business:**
 - a. **Spring Prairie Flower Walk:** Sunday May 3rd 2:00pm at the Nature Centre.
 - b. **Field Trip:** Saturday May 9th with Phil Horch “Birding to Sauder’s and Murray Reservoirs”.
 - c. **City Civic Recognition Awards:** Wednesday May 20, 2015, 7:00pm at the Esplanade. Sean Allen to receive the Environmental Award for the Baby’s Breath removal project.
 - d. **Spring Bird & Flower Count:** Sunday May 24, 2015 – contact Marty Drut, Nature Centre to be assigned an area.
 - e. **“Get Out” Program:** Rob Gardner gave a brief outline to encourage people outside for recreation. He would like to get all outdoor recreation organizations (non-profit) online so that they are in the loop. Rob moved that GN support the “Get Out” Program. Second. Motion carried.
 - f. **Next GN Board Meeting:** Tuesday May 5th, 2015, 7:00pm at Anne Bernhardt’s home.
 - g. **Next GN General Meeting:** Tuesday May 26, 2015, 7:00pm at the Nature Centre.
 - h. **Meeting Adjournment:** 7:25pm.
 - i. **Tonight’s Indoor Program:** Janet Ng presentation on “Ferruginous Hawks in Southern Alberta”. Attendance: 25

Summary of the Presentation on the Ferruginous Hawk

By Janet Ng, PhD Candidate, University of Alberta

At the monthly Grasslands Naturalists Meeting on April 28, Janet Ng entertained and informed a group of 25 enthralled attendees.

Janet started off her talk by regaling us with a story as to how she particularly became interested in birds. For many wildlife researchers the glamorous research projects are the studies of large carnivores. Until Janet's fateful encounter with a Swainson's Hawk that was her goal as well. While working in the field Janet was momentarily stunned by a thwack on the back and when she turned around she was again struck on the back and flattened. She soon ascertained that she had been struck by a Swainson's Hawk who was guarding a nearby nest. While many of us would have sworn off birds forever, and in particular raptors, this encounter sealed her fate as a lover of birds and of raptors in particular. From that date forward she has concentrated on the study of raptors; in particular the Ferruginous Hawk.

Janet has been studying the Ferruginous Hawks of southern Alberta and Saskatchewan since 2010 but the Ferruginous Hawk had become a species of concern in the 1990's when their numbers plunged from about 1500 individuals to less than 500. This sparked the need to ascertain why such a plummet in numbers and hence the Ferruginous Hawk study project at the University of Alberta was conceived. It was quickly determined that not too much was known about the Ferruginous Hawk's habits, hunting areas, preferences for breeding areas, etc.

The Ferruginous Hawk is the largest North American Hawk. The female weighs in the order of 2 kilograms while the male weighs about 1.2 kilograms. The wing span of this hawk is in the order of 1.7 meters.

It has been found that this species practices nest fidelity returning year after year to their old nest site. Many of the nests are built in available trees but they also nest on buildings and even on the ground. A program in the late 90s was instituted whereby nesting platforms were erected and this species took readily to them. The favourite prey of this hawk is the Richardson Ground Squirrel with about 85% of their diet consisting of this delicate morsel but like all predators they are opportunists taking what prey presents itself. A family of hawks can clean up 500 gophers in a single summer. The best breeding success takes place in the grasslands regions but they have also been found to nest in predominantly farmland areas and they even nest in areas greatly disturbed by oil and gas production (Janet showed us a photo of a nest on an gas well building).

Part of Janet's study has been the capturing of a number of birds, with the help of their 25 year old Great Horned Owl, Cecil, to tag them with a video camera and GPS tracking device. The migration of this species seems to follow well established migration patterns. They overwinter in New Mexico and Arizona and even as far south as northern Mexico. So far they have recovered 45,000 hours of video which must be pored over by research assistants for relevant data.

The Ferruginous Hawk seems to have made a good come back in that about 1200 to 1500 now exist in the southern prairies.

