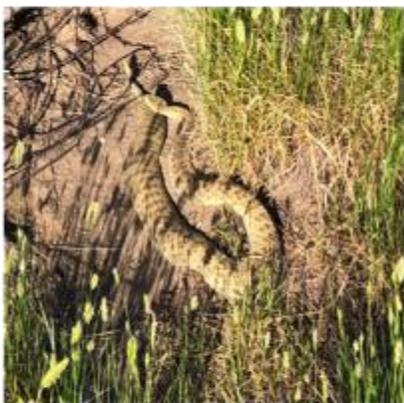


THE SAGEBRUSH CHRONICLE



GN Annual General Meeting @ 16:00 on Sunday, September 13, 2020

This meeting will be held outdoors in Police Point Park near the Nature Centre. Please bring your own lawn chair, umbrella?, face mask (if you feel more comfortable with one) and your own water bottle (there will be no food or beverages available). Social Distancing will be practiced. Please attend to elect and meet your new slate of executives. There will be no speaker but after a short meeting you may wish to avail your selves of a fall walk in the park and perhaps stay for the "Music in the Park" program beginning at 6:30PM.

Executive

President	Hugh Armstrong	526-1003
	hugh.armstrong@grasslands-naturalists.org	
Vice-President	Phil Horch	529-5918
Secretary	Betty Rainville	527-4949
Treasurer and Memberships	Eileen Cowtan	526-1264
Past-President	Dave McKenzie	527-1701
Directors at Large	Ian & Angela Turner	526-1350
	Linda Fisher	548-7706

MH Interpretive Program

(Managed by Grasslands Naturalists)

Based in Police Point Park Nature Centre

To contact the Nature Centre call the:

Nature Line at (403) 529-6225

Also find us on Facebook and Twitter
Policepointpark

The Nature Centre is open from:

Tuesdays to Sunday from 09:00AM to 4:30PM

The family accessible washroom is open:

Every day from 09:00 to 11:30 & 12:00 to 16:00

Wow! Do we feel like the whole world has been given a good shake?

Just as we were going full steam ahead with our usual Easter school programs, and setting up for the BIG Easter weekend, all activities just stopped!

The Nature Centre was closed to the public but staff continued to provide ideas and information for teachers, students, and families. Year round staff and our 2 summer students worked hard on new approaches and moved many things to social media. The response was very positive.

Since July 2, the Nature Centre has been open on close to regular hours. The Park and trails are very busy. Families are out and doing things together. And of course the goats were a big hit.

Our public events have included some new "Wellness in Nature" ideas. Don't worry, we will still be doing some of our flower, bird, and riparian area walks. **You will notice that we have to request registration or sign in for covid tracing for all activities.**

Stay tuned for more.

he Sagebrush Chronicle is published ten times a year by Grasslands Naturalists. **Submissions of writing and artwork are welcomed but must be edited for publication. Deadline: the 10th of each month.** If you would like to advertise in the Chronicle, more information is available from the editor. Submissions are to be sent to: milton.spitzer@gmail.com (403-528-3120). Do not imbed photos in articles but **do send** them separately.

The Society of Grasslands Naturalists encourages the study, conservation and protection of all components of the natural world. The Society provides educational opportunities, assists in the collection and provision of species data, acts as stewards of the environment, discusses environmental topics and organizes member activities. The Society also manages the Medicine Hat Interpretive Program.

General Meetings: 4th Tuesday, Sept. - May **Board Meetings:** 1st Tuesday Sept. - June

To join Grasslands Naturalists and/or send a tax-deductible donation, write:

Grasslands Naturalists
Box 2491
Medicine Hat, AB T1A 8G8

Contact info: Nature Centre 529-6225

Annual Membership Dues: Eileen Cowtan

Individuals \$20

Families \$25

Organizations \$25

Donations to Grassland Naturalists and Interpretive Program are another great way to support local nature and nature education. Tax receipts are issued for all donations over \$10. Your generosity is greatly appreciated!

EDITORIAL DISCLAIMER

The opinions expressed by the authors in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the editor and the Grasslands Naturalists. The editor reserves the right to edit, reject or withdraw articles submitted. While due care will be taken of all manuscripts, photos or artwork submitted, GN cannot be held responsible for any loss or damage to such articles.

GN Website:

www.grasslands-naturalists.org

GN Facebook:

<http://www.facebook.com/GrasslandsNaturalists/>

You must be a Facebook member to view most of it.

IP Coming Activities:

Music in Nature **6:30PM on Sept. 13.** (following the GN AGM)

Berm Walk at **2:00 PM. on World River Day Sept. 27.**

Story Walk® for all ages will be part of Alberta Culture Days. Schedule TBA.

Member's Corner

We hope you had a great summer full of outdoor activities and exciting nature discoveries. Judging by the over whelming response to the editor's request for photographs depicting your nature outings and findings most of you did. Thank you for your submissions and over the next several Chronicles we hope to get most of the photos published. However if, in the meantime, you take photos that you feel would be worthy for publishing in the Chronicle don't hesitate to send them to milton.spitzer@gmail.com.

President's Report to the September (March) 2020 AGM

Welcome back everyone! 2020 has been an eventful year to say the least! As you are well aware, we have not met as a group since February's GM and, as mentioned in the general mail out last week, this September 13th afternoon meeting becomes our March AGM. Thus, we will be holding elections for the Executive Board positions. John Slater has stepped up to run the elections.

Some semblance of normalcy has returned to the GN as we have a reopened Nature Centre, and revised MHIP programs that are working out well. Some Fall nature walks have resumed and soon someone will be phoning to get your Bird seed orders. (Order lots this year, as the income side of the MHIP took a hit due to COVID!!)

The Issues Committee has been active over the past few months; we have had members locating noxious and invasive plants for Parks and Recreation and we continued to clear Baby's Breath plants from in and above the entrance to PPP.

The Board has continued to have our regular meetings via Skype and it has worked out well. We actually got it almost right the first try! Pretty good for old folk!

It's not too early to remind Committee Heads to get your Budgets drawn up and into Paul before Nov 1st.

And to reiterate my last two paragraphs from the March message:

This will be my last President's message. Phil Horch has put his name forward to take over. Thank you so much Phil. We do need someone to be a Vice-President! Think about it!

Lastly, I want to thank my Board, who are all prepared to carry on in their capacities, for their hard work and dedication over the last four plus years. We always have had great and sometimes lively Board meetings, and some have gone overtime. But it's all the same goal and that is, the good of the Society and the environment. I will continue to be at most Board meetings as Past-president, if just to make sure I don't miss all the great baking!

The last four and a half years have been both a pleasure and a privilege to have served. It has been an honour.

Thank you,
Hugh

Photo Credits for Cover Page

Starting from the top left and proceeding clockwise the particulars regarding the photos on the cover are as follows: Merlin eating dragonfly at Scout's Falls; photo by Mark Schiebelbein: Leafy Spurge Eating Goats at Police Point Park; photo by Ian Turner: Sunflowers along Redcliff River Valley Trail; photo by Holly Mackie: Milkweed Flower near Linda Fisher's Residence; photo by Linda Fisher: Pregnant Rattlesnake near 23rd Street NE; photo by Hendrik Hak.

Upcoming Events, Field Trips and Announcements

Note: The GN Board has agreed, so long as current health guidelines regarding social distancing and other restrictions are followed, that outdoor activities can again be organized. It should also be noted that for the Interpretive Program events one must preregister or sign in to allow for Covid tracing. For the Nature Walks wear appropriate footwear and for the cleanup activities bring gloves. All walks will be completed by noon. In this regard then are the following activities in September and October:

Sept. 13 at 16:00: Annual General Meeting of the Grasslands Naturalists: This is an outdoor event near the Nature Centre. (See the cover page for details).

Sept. 13 at 18:30: Music in the Park: An outdoor event near the Nature Centre. Bring your lawn chairs, water, facemasks (if you feel more comfortable with them on), etc.

Sept. 16 at 09:30: Nature Walk at Echo Dale Regional Park. Meet at the upper viewpoint. Led by John Slater.

Sept. 23 at 09:30: Ranchlands Cleanup. Meet at the far NE end of Ranchlands Boulevard. Contact John Slater.

Sept. 27 at 2:00 PM: Berm Walk led by the Nature Centre for World River Day. Contact the Nature Centre for details regarding the meeting place etc.

Sept. 30 at 09:30: Strathcona Park Cleanup. Meet at the Heritage Pavilion. Contact John Slater.

Oct. 7 at 09:30: River Side Walk. Meet at 1st Street and 5th Avenue NW. Led by Martha Munz Gue.

Oct. 14 at 09:30: Either PP Park or Gas City Campground. Led by John and Martha.

Oct. 21 at 09:30: Teepee to Saamis Coulee: Led by Martha Munz Gue.

Oct. 28 at 09:30: New Redcliff Cemetery Trails: Meet at the Redcliff Cemetery. Led by John Slater and Paula Munroe.



Horseshoe Canyon: Photo by Barry Anderson



Cloud Formation along Eagle Butte Road:
Photo by Donna Steele

Exciting Sightings by Bob Frew

Some of the first signs of avian fall migration were observed in late August, and continue into the first week of September. Our common summer resident species have completed their nesting cycles and are also preparing to head south. Fall migrants including warblers, vireos, flycatchers, grosbeaks, and sparrow species are passing through our city parks. The cancelling of GN summer birding trips due to Covid 19 protocols has curtailed the opportunity for sighting some species normally tallied on these trips. During the summer hiatus there have been some exciting sightings.

Bullock's Oriole- Formally considered a subspecies of the Baltimore Oriole, The adult Bullock's shows less black on the head, has an orange supercilium, a black eye line, and a bold white patch on the wing. On June 13th, Eric Vokes reported a pair of Bullock's Orioles at the intersection of HWYs 887/501 south of Manyberries, where the species has been reported in previous years.

Pacific Wren- This species was formerly considered a subspecies of the Winter Wren. Milt and Elaine Spitzer saw this previously reported, by Calgary birders, singing Pacific Wren on the Beaver Creek Trail in the Cypress Hills on July 2nd. The species is considered rare, and can be difficult to find in Alberta.

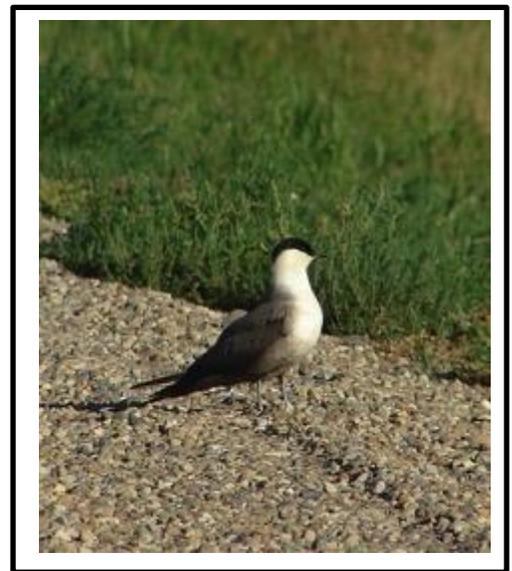
Nelson's Sparrow-Two Nelson's Sparrows were observed, and their song was heard by Ethan Denton along the causeway at Elkwater Lake on July 17th. Identification was based on the Nelson's Sparrow's distinctive song (described as the sound of a "soda can opening") which distinguishes it from the similar Le Conte's Sparrow (song is an insect-like buzz). The Nelson's Sparrow is considered a vagrant in the Cypress Hills.

Vireos- The sightings of Red-eyed, Warbling and Philadelphia Vireos were reported in Strathcona Island Park, at the confluence of Ross Creek and the South Saskatchewan River by Eric Vokes on August 22nd. This vireo hat-trick was topped, when a fourth vireo species was reported by Eric at Police Point Park on August 29th, where he fortuitously sighted two Blue-headed Vireos.

Ruffed Grouse- This species is usually heard drumming, but it can be more difficult to actually see one. A Ruffed Grouse which emerged from the woods and walked onto the Reesor Lake Road, was observed by Bob Frew as he was driving up the hill from Reesor Lake on July 20th.

Long-tailed Jaeger- George Koopmans reported a Long-tailed Jaeger at Sauder Reservoir (Rattlesnake Lake) on August 1st. George's prompt reporting of his sighting enabled others including GN birders, and visitors from Lethbridge, Calgary and Edmonton to add the jaeger to their lists. The Long-tailed Jaeger is the smallest of the three arctic breeding jaeger species. Its long central tail feathers are diagnostic. In fall the species migrates well off the west coast, and is rare in the western interior. The jaeger was still present on August 6th.

Wood Warblers- Fall warbler migration was underway in the latter part of August. There have been several Canada Warbler sightings; this warbler is easily recognized by its distinct yellow "spectacles" and "black necklace". It is considered a vagrant in the prairie region in fall (Southeastern Alberta Checklist). Milt and Elaine Spitzer had sightings at Police Point Park on August 14th and 19th, and Bob Frew also had a sighting there on August 18th. Barry Anderson had a similar sighting on August 20th at Strathcona Island Park, and Eric Vokes also had one on August 22nd.



Long-tailed Jaeger: Photo by Bob Frew

Other recent warbler sightings at Police Point Park included; a Magnolia Warbler on August 24th reported by Milt Spitzer. Wilson's, Blackpoll, Tennessee, and Yellow-rumped Warblers reported by Milt and Elaine Spitzer on August 31st. Northern Waterthrushes (2) were observed by Dan Schiebelbein on August 20th and a Black-throated Green Warbler observed by Bob Frew on August 28th. Phil and Annalora Horch reported several warbler species at Echo Dale Park on August 26th including; American Redstarts, Wilson's, Black and White, Orange-crowned, and Yellow Warblers. To date there have been no significant fallouts, rather, warblers are being seen among small pockets of passerine activity passing through our parks. In all, 15 warbler species have been reported.

Hummingbirds- This fall has been good for migrating hummingbirds, with multiple local sightings, and three species reported. Dan Schiebelbein observed a Ruby-throated Hummingbird at a sugar/water feeder in his NE Crescent Heights garden on August 10th, and by August 26th there were 2 or 3 hummingbirds regularly visiting his feeder. On August 14th Milt and Elaine Spitzer had a Ruby-throated Hummingbird nectaring at Bergamot in their Crescent Heights garden. This species is an uncommon migrant in the prairie region. A Rufous Hummingbird was photographed at the feeder by Dan Schiebelbein on August 25th. This species is a common fall migrant through the Rockies, with some individuals straying east onto the prairies as vagrants. Devaughn Wilkins-Squire reported a Calliope Hummingbird in Vista Heights (Southridge) on September 2nd. This species is the smallest of our North American hummingbirds, and is also the smallest of North American birds. It is a vagrant in the prairie region.

Rose-breasted Grosbeaks- Among the migrant passerines seen at Police Point Park recently, juvenile (1st fall), and female grosbeaks have been reported by local GN birders and interpretive staff.

Red Crossbills- Over the past 3 weeks Phil Horch had noticed large numbers of crossbills on the Alberta side of the Cypress Hills. Curious if this may also be happening on the Saskatchewan side, Phil and Annalora Horch visited the Saskatchewan Cypress Hills Centre Block on September 5th, and witnessed one of the largest irruptions of Red Crossbills that Phil has ever experienced. The sound of Red Crossbills could be heard each time they stepped out of the car, with numbers possibly in the thousands.

Shorebirds- This fall our local wetlands, marshes, lakes and reservoirs including; Pakowki Lake, Chappice Lake, Sauder Reservoir, and smaller dried out alkaline sloughs did not provide optimal habitat for observing migrating shorebirds. The lack of invertebrate-rich mudflats has resulted in lower numbers and limited species diversity of migrants, especially plovers and sandpipers. Water levels at Chappice and Pakowki Lakes have been low, and Kitsim and Sauder Reservoirs have been high during fall migration.

Please report your exciting sightings to Bob Frew: phone 403-526-4573, or e-mail Robert.frew@shaw.ca



Immature Bald Eagle at Alberta Recovery Centre. On arm of Colin Weir. Photo by Rob Gardner



Yellow-breasted Chat at Cherry Grove: Photo by Dan Schiebelbein.

Carol Porter Bluebird Trail Results For 2020

The Carol Porter Bluebird Trail consists of 93 boxes located along the Eagle Butte, Ranchville, Jackpot, Thelma and Wildcat Roads. This trail has been continuously monitored since 1989 with only minor changes to the number and locations of boxes. These are situated on fence posts along a 55 km. reach. During the period April through August boxes are visited and serviced weekly (on a three week rotational basis) by a devoted group of volunteers whose efforts result in optimal success in the fledging of young (fledging is used in this report as the successful departure of the young from the box). The volunteers service the boxes affecting necessary repairs, count and record the eggs and/or young at each box. After the young have fledged they clean out each box readying them for a second nesting or for the following year.

In 2020 this dedicated group of volunteers included:

- Peggy and Mike Hansen
- Lorraine and Randy Stotz
- Mel Bender
- Ann and Dennis Hall
- Hugh and Dee Armstrong
- Beth and Ted Turner
- Ric Carrier
- Kathleen and Brian Lowery
- Dee and Brent Cowan
- Jim and JoAnne MacFarlane
- Donna Steele and Sue Higgins
- Ian and Angela Turner
- Milt and Elaine Spitzer

Without these dedicated volunteers the rearing success would be much diminished. Also thanks to Ben Verner who keeps us supplied with replacement boxes.

In 2020 a total of 280 young bluebirds fledged from a total of 313 eggs. This was the best result in the past four years and numbers were slightly above average. Sterile egg numbers (19) were less than average and only 7 eggs were abandoned. Abandoned eggs are defined as those eggs that disappeared due to predators as well as those that were simply left in the nest. Also 9 young were found dead in the nests; somewhat below the normal. The good numbers of fledglings and reduced number of unsuccessful eggs and dead young is likely attributable to the good weather conditions in the spring and summer; no spring snowstorms occurred this year.

Tree Swallows also use the nest boxes and are in direct competition with the Mountain Bluebirds for the use of the boxes. Fortunately Tree Swallows arrive a little later than the bluebirds and thus the male bluebird will have staked out his box usually repelling all potential rivals. Squabbles still do occur at some box sites and duplicating boxes (on side by side posts) often can reduce the intense rivalry. In 2020 some 288 Tree Swallows were reared in the boxes. Tree Swallows in their own right are a desirable species for their insect eating abilities but they are more numerous and are less dependent on man made cavities for successful nesting. Nesting boxes have principally been installed to provide nesting cavities for the bluebirds whose natural cavities have been usurped by alien species such as European Starling and House Sparrow.



<Wren nest with
eggs at St.
Margaret's Church

Typical bluebird
nest with eggs >

Photos by Lorraine
Stotz.



September 2020 Issues Report to the GN Board

Members of Committee: John Slater & Martha Munz Gue (cochairs), Tina Regehr, Marty Drut, Paula Munroe, Gerry Elhert, with another two or three people wishing to be kept “in the loop” but without time to work on things (Alicia Lew, Martha Maudsley, John Whidden).

On-going issues:

Invasive species, conservation and restoration of native prairie. Gerry Ehlert is taking the lead and is working with the Parks and Rec Department. This document has been prepared by Gerry and the committee and shared with the Parks Department, and the Planning Department: A Case for Conservation of Native Prairie. Several members have attended the open house sessions about the Municipal Development Plan, the Echo Dale redevelopment plan, and the Dunmore Windfarms. Thank you Gerry for bringing the value of native prairie to the attention of these planners. Gerry also sits on monthly meetings of EURAB. See Gerry’s report below for more. Paula expressed concern about the degradation of the Redcliff coulees in recent years. Ideas? Paula plans to connect with the parent council of her son’s school. Paula also prepared laminated signs to encourage trail users to stay on the signs. She and her family posted these signs at the entrances to trail. Paula and her sons water weekly 7 young cottonwood trees that she propagated from cuttings and planted at the Connaught Restoration site.

Water and riparian habitat. Tina, Paula, and Martha are on SEAWA committees. Would GN like to “adopt” one of the restoration sites for watering and weeding? (Perhaps Cottonwood because Paula and sons are going there already and could use help). SEAWA has prepared a detailed feedback for the City Municipal Development Plan. The SEAWA Gallery in the Arcade Plaza Downtown on Third Street is currently showing artwork relating to water and riparian plants as well as posters showing the riparian restoration experiments. Recommend GN members apply to SEAWA to be on the email list for the SEAWA quarterly newsletter.

“Nature Deficit”. Weekly walks are offered to members; a different location each week. Proposing twice weekly: Wednesday Wildflower/Nature Walks, and Friday Forest Walks. Would like to connect with schools to encourage such walks after school led by school councils or Phys Ed folks. Partnering with schools and other groups (Mywassin, Newcomers, Scouts/Guides, etc) could bring more people outside to enjoy nature. Wildflower brochure and GN website have been useful to ID wildflowers, grasses, butterflies. Sometimes we report invasive weeds on the EDDMapS app. Question: Could these walks be jointly sponsored by GN and IP? Also, three “en plein air” painting groups are each meeting weekly. (not a GN initiative but celebrated by GN Issues Committee as appreciation of nature is inherent in the activity). SEAWA Gallery displays local art about the watershed.

Wildflowers and Pollinators. Awareness actions: Brochure, website, walks, wildflower garden at PPP, Case for Conserving Native Prairie.

Climate. Climate Conversations at 4 pm on Fridays have resumed. Currently they are held in Kin Coulee Park near the Kinetite Korner Playground. Bring own chair and beverage if desired. Notes are available on Slack for attendees. Rob Gardner has created a local collaborative “Transition” network. Check website for Transition Medicine Hat.

Garbage. Suggest two fall garbage pick ups in September: Ranchlands and Strathcona Island. Also weekly walks always involve picking up garbage (as an a-side). Someone always has a bag. Concern about increased garbage from single-use masks and gloves, and return to single-use plastic grocery bags. Ideas?

Issues that were reported by the public

Location of new skate board structure on former native prairie (now half crested wheat). Three people contacted me about this. They also spoke to councilors and others in the city. Perhaps GN could connect with the skateboard association and ask if they would like to partner with GN on Clean up projects along Seven Persons Creek, and along the NECH coulee (upper and lower parts). Gerry recommended not to fuss over this issue, while we are enjoying cooperation from Parks with our “Case of Conserving Native Prairie”.

Weeds, garbage and water on NE side of overpass. Homeowner contacted city and GN having seen in the Chronicle that we have an issues committee. Flash flooding of her basement happened after rainwater came downhill from two directions and directed by the overpass and swail to her house. Homeowner collected 8 big bags of garbage from nearby her property. City sent someone to weed wack the weeds. Flooding still a potential problem. Follow-up ideas?

Some Riverside homeowners clearing forest between their home and river. This recurring problem was brought to our attention by an attendee of the SEAWA tour of riparian restoration projects in July. Suggest mailbox delivery of “Living by Water” Materials. Other ideas? (Gerry Elhert’s Report in October)



Hummingbird Moth (White-lined Sphinx Moth)
Photo by Paula Munroe



Monarch Butterfly Caterpillar
Photo by Linda Fisher



Underwing Moth (Lkely joined sub-species)
Photo by Hendrik Hak



Tiger Swallowtail
Photo by
Donna Steele



Caterpillar on Leafy
Spurge: Photo by
Matha Muz Gue



Blue-eyed Darner Dragonfly
Photo by Dan Schiebelbein



Coltsfoot at Reeser Lake
Don Zimmer



Prairie Rocket
Linda Fisher



Coneflower or Mexican Hat:
Martha Munz Gue



Pincushion Cactus