

THE SAGEBRUSH CHRONICLE



Greetings from the staff at the Interpretive Program

The Nature Centre is closed during this 4 week shutdown, but we are still busy, and still thinking of you.

Someone will be at the Nature Centre every day. The accessible washroom will be open from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. We will be answering the phone and trying to answer questions. We will be checking e-mails and responding to those too. We will accept phone orders and payment for items in the Nature Shop. Customers can make an appointment to pick their orders up.

Christmas Bird Count is going ahead. Most of you have your assigned territories, or have signed up with Marty to watch your feeder. Obviously, it will be less social than most years, but we hope that you will still have fun. There will be no potluck feast this year. Results can be submitted in a couple different ways. An e-mail to Marty at marty.drut@natureline.info is the most convenient. If you want to drop off a paper copy at the Nature Centre, please phone ahead and set a time so someone can meet you at the door.

While we really miss seeing everyone, we all need to respect the need for the lockdown restrictions and work towards improving our community health.

Stay well and have a Merry Healthy Christmas.

Corlaine

In spite of the COVID restrictions we extend to you our best wishes in the hopes that you have a:

Joyful Holiday Season
And that
2021 Will be a Happier New Year!
Stay Safe and Healthy!

Executive and Board Members

President Phil Horch 403-529-5918
phil.horch@grasslands-naturalists.org

Vice-President Vacant

Secretary Betty Rainville
betty.rainville@grasslands-naturalists.org

Treasurer Angela Turner
angela.turner@grasslands-naturalist.org

Past-President Hugh Armstrong
hugh.armstrong@grasslands-naturalists.org

Directors at Large Eileen Cowtan
eileen.cowtan@grasslands-naturalists.org

Ian Turner
ian.turner@grasslands-naturalists.org

Linda Fisher
linda.fisher@grasslands-naturalists.org

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 Closed due to new
COVID restrictions**

**The family accessible washroom is open:
Each day from 09:00 to 11:30 & 12:00 to 16:30**

**See front page for more details regarding the
Nature Centre Activities.**

**Note: The Medicine Hat Christmas Bird
Count is on Sunday, December 20th. With
the closure of the Nature Centre the Count
Coordinator prefers receiving results by
email at:
marty.drut@natureline.info .**

If you are absolutely unable to email the results they can be dropped off at the Nature Centre but it is essential that you phone the Centre first.

The 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 (**suspended during COVID**), 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.

**Again our Best Wishes to You
for the Upcoming Holiday
Season!**

Member's Corner

It is time to think about renewing your membership. To this end the application form is at the end of this Chronicle. Please fill this out in a diligent and complete manner as it is meant to protect you and the Society. Also GN is a nonprofit organization and thus any donations over \$10 will be receipted and may be used as a deduction when preparing your income tax. Unfortunately with the present COVID restrictions all GN outings and meetings are cancelled until further notice. Hopefully we can get back on track relatively soon into the coming year.

A number of our members and former members have been recognized for their outstanding contributions to understanding nature in southeastern Alberta or for their dedicated environmental works.

GN's **Jan Scott and Sandi Robertson** (Alberta Fish and Wildlife) were recently given the Wolley Dod Discovery Award from the Alberta Lepidopterist' Guild. The award is for their discovery of the moth, *Holcocera gigantella*, which is a new species in Alberta and Canada and also for their discovery of a new host plant, *Yucca glauca*, for this species of moth. According to the Alberta Lepidopterist' Guild website, 'the Wolley Dod Award is given annually for the most significant Alberta Lepidoptera discovery of the season'.



Grasslands Naturalist recognized by the City of Medicine Hat

From her arrival in Medicine Hat in 1989 to her death in 2013 **Dawn Dickinson** made a lasting contribution to the preservation of natural spaces and the conservation of species in SE Alberta.

Dawn was a stalwart member of the Grasslands Naturalists and an environmental crusader to be reckoned with. She was a refined English Lady with the stubbornness of a mule and the tenacity of a wolverine.

In recognition of her significant contribution to the preservation of wild spaces, the City of Medicine Hat has dedicated the riparian area southeast of Strathcona Island Park in her memory. The area lies north of Industrial Avenue (Highway 41A), between Seven Persons and Ross Creeks, with a narrow strip extending on the west bank to Strathcona Island.

We hope that her example will provide inspiration as you enjoy the wildlife in this park. This sign is located along Highway 41A near the Seven Persons Creek Crossing

The above article was prepared by Bob Mutch and slightly edited by Rob Gardner. It should be noted that a similar signs have been erected honouring **Donna MacLean**. See page 8 of this Chronicle.

President's Report To Members by P. Horch

As I write this report, Medicine Hat and southeastern Alberta seem to be plunging into a new and more serious level of covid-19 spread. This is happening after several months of being spared what the rest of the country was experiencing. As a result, we have a newer stricter level of provincial health regulations to deal with, though not a complete lockdown. This means that for the time being, we have to put the idea of resuming indoor programs on hold.

At our most recent board meeting on December 1 it was decided to keep monitoring the situation monthly and resume indoor meetings when we can do so under conditions that are safe for our members and are approved by Alberta Health. I'm sure we are all getting tired of living under pandemic conditions but at least we can continue to enjoy the outdoors which makes possible some normality in our lives. Check out the neighborhood walks (since report was prepared all walks have been cancelled) that are available this month. Also, the Christmas Bird Count takes place on December 20th, albeit without the usual potluck afterwards. Vaccines are coming so there is hope for next year.

Our Governance Committee under the chairmanship of Paul Thibault held a lengthy meeting to do an annual review of the policies and procedures that govern our society. A few important points came out of that meeting which I highlight below. If you are on a Grasslands Naturalists Committee, these may apply to you:

- All committee members should be aware of our society's policies and procedures and should be following them. They are easily accessed on the Grasslands Naturalists website. The GN Board is responsible for monitoring and ensuring compliance.
- Most committees should be keeping records such as minutes and any documents with legal ramifications (such as contracts and agreements if applicable) as a permanent record.
- Because of provincial laws and insurance requirements, it is important that our society is in compliance with these, especially as it relates to privacy laws and waivers. Insurance has become one of our biggest annual budget costs. The governance committee has revised our waiver form and it is absolutely critical that every member sign one if they participate in our programs, indoor or outside. Watch for it in this and future editions of the Grasslands Chronicle. If you have never signed one, please do and send it in. We need to have it on file.

Some of these legal requirements are onerous and bureaucratic but unfortunately are necessary because of the times we live in.

Another important matter that the board has dealt with is the need for volunteers. We are looking for somebody to be our society's representative on Nature Alberta which is the umbrella organization for all Alberta Naturalists Society. This mostly involves attending on-line meetings with other Alberta naturalist society members and acting as liaison between our society and Alberta Nature. If interested contact me. We also are in need of a Vice-President for our society. If leadership along with love of nature is your passion, I want to hear from you!

In spite of COVID-restrictions, our members continue to be involved in exciting activities. The issues committee is doing some important work on invasive plants, the board has some interesting ideas for future events, birders are reporting the first Snowy Owl and massive numbers of Snow Buntings, and neighborhood walks brought many naturalists together safely. (The latest COVID rules prohibit outdoor groups).

As we head into the Christmas season we are expecting that this will be a Christmas unlike any other. Our first responsibility is to stay safe. I have a brother who just contracted covid-19 because of one innocent visit with a close family member. I know Annalora and I are skeptical that we will be able to visit our family in the Calgary area this year. We have already cancelled thanksgiving time with them. Some of us will have to get creative about how we celebrate this Christmas and New Year season. So this year we wish you a merry and **safe** holiday season. Maybe our paths will cross safely on a neighborhood walk or at the Christmas bird count.

Exciting Sightings

Early winter tends to be a quiet season for birding; as birders await the arrival of northern migrants. These include nomadic or irruptive species such as Bohemian Waxwings, Common Redpolls, Crossbills, Pine Grosbeaks and Pine Siskins. These “winter finches” and their predators such as the Northern Shrike and the Northern Goshawk are likely to show up at or around bird feeders.

Winter can also be a good time to look for owls; including the iconic arctic-breeding Snowy Owl which is here only in winter. The Great-horned Owl, Northern Saw-whet Owl, and Short-eared Owl all have year-round ranges that include Southeastern Alberta. In the surrounding Grasslands one may encounter large flocks of Snow Buntings, Horned Larks, or Lapland Longspurs. Exciting sightings reported in November and early December are as follows:

Common Redpoll- This irruptive migrant can be numerous in some years yet absent in others. Redpolls have a red forehead, and black throat, and males can show a pink wash on the breast. Birders are often alerted to their presence by their short calls and trills in flight. Several small groups of Redpolls have been reported, including a sighting of ~40 on November 27th by Milt Spitzer south of the city, along TWP Rd 112, between the Eagle Butte Rd. and RGE Rd. 52.

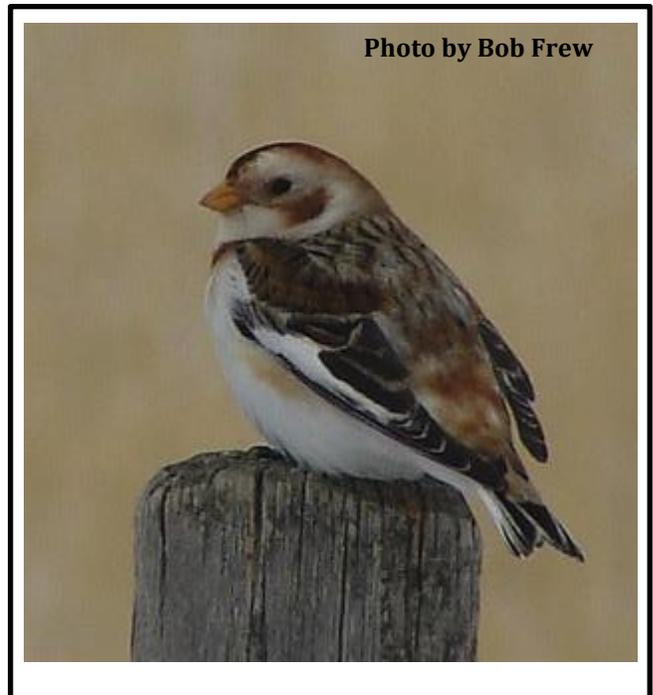
Snow Bunting- In winter these tundra breeders usually travel in large flocks, arriving in southern parts of the province along with the first snowfalls of winter. Dan Schiebelbein encountered one such flock, which he estimated at ~10,000, in stubble fields alongside TWP Rd. 144, between RGE Rds. 73 and 80, north of Bowell on December 1st. An unforgettable sighting!

Northern Goshawk- Distinguished from other accipiter species by its larger and bulkier size, and by its conspicuous white eye brows. A juvenile goshawk was reported by Phil Horch on November 22nd, and by Bob Frew on November 24th (possibly the same bird). Both sightings were at Police Point Park.

Snowy Owl- The first local report this winter of this iconic owl species was reported by Dan Schiebelbein. The owl was observed in a field on the north side of TWP 114, just west of RGE Rd. 73 on November 25th. Snowy Owls have been seen at this same location north of Seven Persons in previous winters.

Northern Shrike- This uncommon winter migrant often uses a tree top snag for a lookout perch from which it hunts rodents and small birds, which it often impales on thorns. Adults are pale gray above with black mask, black wings with small white patch at base of the primaries, and faint grayish barring on under parts. The white wing patches are visible in flight. Phil and Annalora Horch observed a Northern Shrike flying across RGE Rd. 64 on their way to Echo Dale Regional Park on November 22nd. Bob Frew also observed a shrike at Police Point Park on November 24th.

Brown-Creeper- Unlike nuthatches, creepers spiral upwards from the base of a tree when foraging, and then fly to a lower place on another tree to repeat the process. Camouflaged by their streaked brown plumage which blends with the tree bark, this diminutive species can be difficult to detect. Barry and Judy Anderson reported a Brown Creeper in their Ross Glen yard on November 19th.



Continued on next page

Pine Grosbeaks- There have been numerous sightings of this irruptive grosbeak species reported in our city parks by GN birders during the past month, usually involving small groups of <10 grosbeaks. The male's gray overall plumage has red on the head, back, and under parts. The Pine Grosbeak can be detected by its song; which is a soft short musical warble, and when feeding can be quite tame and approachable.

Yellow-rumped Warbler- A very late sighting of this warbler species was reported by Milt Spitzer in the Enchanted Forest at Police Point Park on December 5th. Yellow-rumped Warbler ("Myrtle") migration can continue through October and into November, well after most other warbler species have gone south. It is interesting that the Yellow-rumped Warbler is the only warbler able to digest the waxes found in bayberries and wax myrtle berries (hence its name). This versatility and ability to switch from insects to fruits and berries allows it to linger during migration, and winter further north than other warbler species.

White-winged Crossbills- This irruptive migrant prefers coniferous woods where it forages on spruce cone crops. But its wanderings can be unpredictable, and it can show up anywhere. Milt Spitzer reported 7 crossbills, including both male and female on a cottonwood behind the Nature Centre at Police Point Park on December 6th. The latest report, Dec. 10, is from Linda Fisher who reported 6 at her acreage in Cypress County. The male is pink overall with black wings and bold white wing bars. The crossed bill is distinctive.

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

Nature Alberta Board of Directors Meeting and AGM November 21, 2020

(listened in via teleconference) and submitted by Angela and Ian Turner

The highlights from the Nature Alberta Board of Directors meeting and AGM held on Saturday, November 21st are as follows:

1. **Financial Update:** there have been cutbacks; there is no money for an Executive Director (Rick Schneider is volunteering for now); they are doing okay, but do need more grants and funds to grow.
2. **Executive:** Linda Howitt-Taylor stepped down as President and Liz Watts agreed to step in as President.
3. **Board Restructuring:** Nature Alberta wants to create a Nature Network to increase relevance of Nature Alberta and improve effectiveness of the organization.
4. **Communications:** The Nature Alberta website has been restructured (check it out at <https://naturealberta.ca/>). It has three main components --- 'Learn About Nature', 'Explore Nature', and 'Protect Nature'. The website is current and continually updated. Social media is being used more and more with 8,500 followers on Facebook.

5. **Nature Network:**

Stage 1 (past)

- Insurance, access to free Zoom meetings, charitable status for grant applications.

Stage 2 (now underway)

- Promote club events and outreach efforts, promote clubs themselves, access to shared image library and education resources, provincial conservation advocacy.

Stage 3 (future)

- Serve as a network hub: library of resources for small clubs; host a forum for clubs; help clubs with advice, speakers, issues, etc.; provide Zoom meetings on topics of broad interest to clubs; Conservation and Habitat stewardship joint program delivery; joint publications; help find and apply for grants.

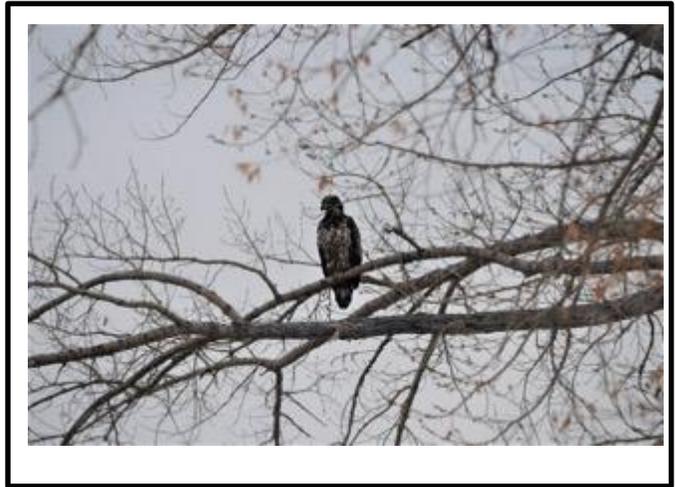
Continued on next page

6. **Future:**

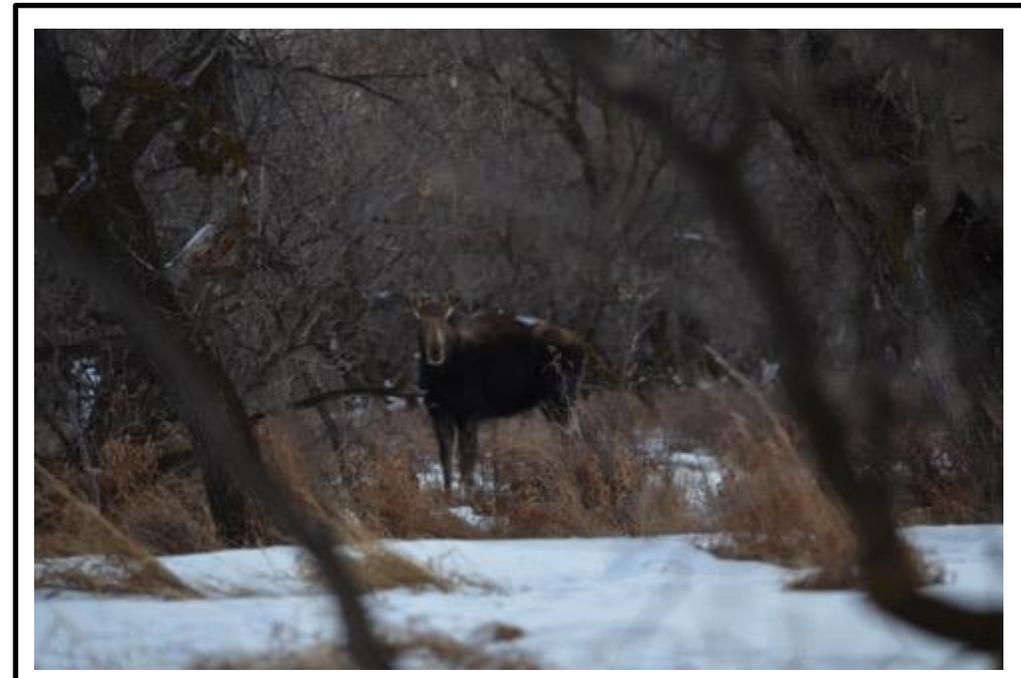
- a. Communications: shift focus to social media, continue magazine development, complete build-out of the website.
- b. Implementation of the Nature Network: Stage 3 activities --- host an event; increase conservation related efforts (eg. KBA's and provincial parks issue).
- c. Membership Drive: linked to the 50th Anniversary. **Note: a life time membership is available until March 31, 2021 for \$10.00 --- act now!!**
- d. Fundraising

Contributed Nature Photographs from Members

The editor is always looking for nature photographs from GN members for potential publication in the Chronicle. Please forward as a jpg attachment to: milton.spitzer@gmail.com .



An immature Bald Eagle photographed by Bruce McLeod. Both mature and immature Bald Eagles have been patrolling the South Saskatchewan River in Medicine Hat.



This cow moose was observed and photographed by Bruce McLeod in the Ross Creek Pheasant Habitat near Deerview Meats.

Apparently there has also been a moose wandering the coulees near the College.



This fall Dan Schiebelbein (dansnaturephotography.com) took this photo of a long-tailed weasel in his winter finery. It was southwest of Medicine Hat. The young long-tailed weasel, on the right, in his summer fur was photographed by Milt Spitzer near Michelle Reservoir this summer.

MACLEAN LEGACY PARK

Donna L. MacLean
(1914 - 2013)

Donna MacLean was an accomplished local artist, former teacher, curier, and amateur botanist. She, along with her husband Duncan, was also an avid sportsperson and hunter who loved nature and was a member of Ducks Unlimited. Her involvement with the Community Foundation of SE Alberta established a number of endowment funds supporting a variety of interests. The love she had for Medicine Hat and its community members was apparent in how she carefully established endowments which would benefit the people of SE Alberta for future generations. Donna and Duncan were very successful in their endeavors as they actively contributed to the community through charitable donations and volunteerism.

Donna took great joy in judging art exhibitions and serving on the Library Board. As an artist and art instructor, she taught in many Canadian cities and her works are collected in many public institutions, corporations and private collectors. She was a founding member of the Mad Hatters Art Club and mentored many developing artists.

This natural park area is a legacy to Donna as a combination of her love and passion for the art and the outdoors, her artist eye for her surroundings, and a place where adults and children can play.

"I CONSIDER IT A JOY TO LIVE IN THIS MARVELOUS COUNTRY OF CANADA AND BE ABLE TO RECORD SOME OF ITS INCREDIBLE BEAUTY"

Medicine Hat
The Legacy

<There are two signs honouring **Donna MacLean**

These can be found along the Heritage Pavilion Pond at the peninsula picnic site and across from the ball diamond in Strathcona Park.

A write-up concerning Donna will be published in the January issue of the Chronicle.



Snow on Berries:
Photo by Holly Mackie



Society of Grasslands Naturalists
Box 2491, Medicine Hat, Alberta T1A 8G8



Membership Form for 2021

Name* _____ Name of 2nd Family Member ** _____

Address* _____ Membership: Individual \$20/year _____

City / Province* _____ Family \$25/year _____

Postal Code* _____ Organization \$25/year _____

Telephone+ _____ Donation _____ Tax Receipt Available

Email++ _____ **Total Enclosed** _____

Preference for receiving Chronicle newsletter*:

Post or Email or Neither

Current and recent Chronicles can be viewed and downloaded from the Grasslands Naturalists website www.grasslands-naturalists.org

* Required information. ** Required information for family membership.

+ Optional Information. For phone number(s), please note whether it is a residence, cell phone or business number.

++ Information required if you wish to receive the Chronicle and announcements by email.

Informed Consent for Field Trips

I may wish to participate in field trips and events organized by the Society of Grasslands Naturalists.

I affirm that, as a participant, I and my child(ren)/ward(s) are prepared to stay with the group and follow the directions of the coordinator and activity leader. I affirm that, knowing my personal state of health, I feel that I am mentally and physically capable of participating in the trips and events that I choose to attend.

I acknowledge that I am aware of the inherent risks, hazards, and dangers associated with activities arising from my participation in trips, events, litter cleanups, invasive species removal or any other activity that may result in injury, sickness or death to me or my child(ren)/ward(s). Some of these risks may be specific to the area. These include, but are not limited to, animal attacks as well as poisonous snakes, insects and vegetation. Therefore, in consideration of my participation in these trips and events, for myself, my heirs, my executors, my administrators, and my successors, I voluntarily assume all risks and hereby waive all my rights against Grasslands Naturalists and unconditionally release and discharge the Grasslands Naturalists, its members, directors, officers, its affairs and its coordinators from all manner of activities, causes of action, suits, claims and demands for damages due to personal injury, sickness, death, loss or damage to property, expenses or otherwise which may or shall arise in any way as a result of my participation in the above trips and events.

Signature of Member

Signature of 2nd Family Member

Date: _____ Date: _____



Society of Grasslands Naturalists
Box 2491, Medicine Hat, Alberta T1A 8G8



Consent Form

Consent to the Use and Distribution of Personal Information

Grasslands Naturalists (GN) collects personal information subject to the '*Personal Information Protection Act*' (PIPA). GN may, subject to your consent, wish to make some personal information public through, for example, its Chronicle, Website, Facebook page or newspaper article. Please indicate your consent to the following release of information and note any specific exclusion of a consent such as for children.

| | Yes | No | Exclusion |
|---------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|-----------|
| Name | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | _____ |
| Residence telephone | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | _____ |
| Cell phone | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | _____ |
| Business phone | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | _____ |
| Email address | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | _____ |
| Residence address | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | _____ |
| Pictures | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | _____ |

Beyond the above consents, GN will not distribute personal information to a third party without your consent unless such information is required, by law, to be released to a federal or provincial government agency in order, for example, to maintain GN's non-profit organization status.

Consent to Receive Emails Related to Commercial Activities

GN may wish to send you emails to promote some of its commercial activities including those provided by its *Club* and *Interpretive Program*. Please indicate your consent to receiving such information. Yes No

Modification of Consents

You may modify any of the above consents, at any time, through a written request to the member of the GN Executive responsible for Memberships.

Signature of Member

Signature of 2nd Family Member

Date: _____

Date: _____