

THE SAGEBRUSH CHRONICLE



Interpretive Program News for March 2021 submitted by Corlaine Gardner

With the "One Year of Pandemic" anniversary of sorts just passed, we continue to provide ideas and information from the Nature Centre. The Centre remains closed until at least March 22.

Easter will be quiet in the Park again this year. We have restocked our supplies of Ukrainian egg dyes and equipment. People can phone and order those supplies, or other items from our Nature Shop. We organize payment over the phone and schedule pick up times.

Our small group outings have been well received. We are all getting use to the pre-registration system. Stay tuned for the next events.

Our trails and parks are still available. Stay Well, Stay Active.!

Executive and Board Members

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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 remains Closed due to
COVID-19 restrictions**

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

Easter will again be quiet in the Park this year.
However Ukrainian egg dyes and equipment
can be ordered from the Nature Shop.

The Nature Centre is staffed each day to put
out bird feeders, to open and clean the
bathroom, to answer the phone and to keep up
with projects.

Give the staff a call (403 529-6225) or email
them mhip@natureline.info regarding any
questions you might have or to report any
exciting nature sightings.

**To All:
Stay Safe and Healthy!**

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!

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GN Website:

www.grasslands-naturalists.org

GN Facebook:

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

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

Bald Eagle Cover Photo by Dan Schiebelbein.

dansnaturephotography.com

Our resident pair of bald eagles are again nesting
near the sewage treatment plant across from
Police Point Park. The female has been on the nest
for about two weeks.

Member's Corner

2021 Memberships are Due!

GN had great news this month with five new members joining the society. These new members are: **Justine Bolin, Alicia Lew, Jane McGough, Kat Valenzuela and Brooke Kapeller**. The first four are all part of the Interpretive Program team and it's great that they are now also members of GN. **Brooke** has not only joined the society but has also stepped up to be our Nature Alberta Representative. Thank you Brooke and welcome all!

Call for Nominations:

Subject to Bylaws 4.5.1 Executive Officers are elected by Members at the AGM, and According to the Policy Statement "Nominations and Election of Executive Officers", approved September 6, 2016, Point 1.2, "Nominations shall be received, in writing, by the Board no later than 30 days prior to the AGM and shall indicate that the nominee has been notified and accepts the nomination. These nominations shall be published in the March Chronicle."(COVID date change for AGM. See President's report).

Hi from Linda Fisher - Indoor Program Chair

With our monthly meetings suspended due to COVID, the Board of Directors is looking at ways for GN members to connect, including virtually.
To that end, I am going to learn how to set up and conduct Zoom presentations.
If any members have experience/expertise with Zoom presentations for many participants, and would like to share your knowledge, I would really appreciate it if you could contact me to help me along! Thank you.
Cell phone: 403-502-4970
Email address: linda.fisher@grasslands-naturalists.org

President's Report To GN Members

It's the month of March and the signs of spring are here! Horned Larks are returning in good numbers. Great Horned Owls and our local Bald Eagles have started nesting and presumably may already have laid eggs. By the end of this month we should be seeing the first crocuses on some sunny-facing slope. Aside from about ten days of frigid weather this has been a very mild winter with lengthy chinooks. Climate change? Maybe, but we've had winters like this before in Medicine Hat

March is the month that we observe World Water Day on March 22. Why do we have these kind of observances? In Canada we have an abundance of water, both fresh and salt. Water is something that we are prone to take for granted. However, here in the Palliser Triangle we take water for granted at our peril. Our semi-arid climate is as close as Canada gets to desert and our part of the country may be the most vulnerable when it comes to water scarcity and quality.

Without the water flowing through the South Saskatchewan River, Medicine Hat probably would not exist, at least not like it does today. We rely on our river for our drinking water, for sewage treatment, for food production in our greenhouses and gardens, for irrigation and for the needs of some of our largest local industries. The recent issue of more open pit coal mining and the possibility of selenium pollution has reminded us again that water is vital and needs to be cared for. Observing World Water Day reminds us of how reliant we are on good clean watersheds.

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In Medicine Hat we not only have our river but we also have local creeks and several ponds. We need to be taking care of these vital riparian areas because they support life and in our dry climate they are vulnerable. Elsewhere in this issue of the Chronicle see Martha Gue's proposal; for a World Water Day Project called "Adopt-A-Pond" to be carried out in partnership with SEAWA. I urge you to get involved.

Besides beautiful spring weather we can also see light at the end of the tunnel as far as the pandemic is concerned. We hope to be able to safely resume indoor programming this fall, albeit maybe still wearing masks. The vaccination program should make us all safer. Failing that we may try some zoom indoor programming with guest speakers.

GN AGM To Be Delayed a Month

Normally, our society's AGM would be held in the month of April but your Board of Directors have decided to delay it to May 25 so we can meet in person outside like we did at our last AGM in September 2020. It will likely take place at Police Point Park again but watch for details in the next Chronicle.

I know we are all anxious to return to normal, whatever that is going to look like in the future. We are eager to start up with Grasslands Naturalists usual schedule of both outdoor and indoor programming. Stay tuned.

In the meantime, if you try to contact me in the next few days I may be hard to reach. By the time you read this I will have had hip replacement surgery at Medicine Hat Hospital and hopefully well on my road to recovery. Look after yourself and get outdoors. We all need a beautiful spring lift to our spirits!

Submitted by Phil Horch, President

Exciting Sightings by Bob Frew

March came in like a lamb; with a welcome spell of good weather, bringing above-seasonal temperatures to Southeastern Alberta. Horned Larks which are among the earliest of our grassland migrants have been reported along rural Township and Range Roads, in fallow fields, pastures, and on the open prairie. As we approach the beginning of spring, we can anticipate an increasing diversity of migrant waterfowl on open stretches of water on our prairie lakes, reservoirs, and wetlands. Although February is usually the slowest month for birding, local birders have reported some exciting sightings during the past month:

Northern Goshawk- The largest of our three accipiter species was observed on several separate occasions in February at Police Point Park. At this time of year most sightings are juvenile birds, whereas adult goshawks are relatively rare. An adult Goshawk was reported by Milt Spitzer on February 13th, and again on February 22nd. Bob Frew reported a further sighting on February 28th. Adults have a dark blue-gray back, white under parts, with a dense gray barring. A light-coloured stripe which extends from the base of the bill above the eye to the back of the head identifies the goshawk. Juveniles are brown above, and buffy below with brown streaks.

Horned Larks- This species is usually observed in large flocks in winter, and is one of the earliest harbingers of spring on the open prairies, where it disperses into smaller groups. In flight its black tail with white outer feathers is conspicuous, and its song/call is distinctive. Dan Schiebelbein reported numerous sightings of small groups of 2 to 3 birds on a recent outing which included stops at Chinook Conservation Site, Cavan Lake, and Murray Lake.

Pine Grosbeak- This irruptive "winter finch" species has been observed regularly this winter by local birders in our local city parks. Barry Anderson observed 10 Pine Grosbeaks foraging on buds at Strathcona Island Park on March 1st. This number is fairly typical of those reported previously this winter.

Continued on next page

Common Grackle- Barry and Judy Anderson reported 5 Common Grackles in their Ross Glen yard on February 26th. George Koopmans also reported a single bird frequenting the Connaught Pond on February 26th, and again on March 1st. Common Grackles usually make an early spring appearance. The male's all black plumage reveals a blue-purple iridescence in good light.

Crossbill species- A flock of ~ 60 **White-winged Crossbills** was observed feeding on cone seeds from coniferous trees on the golf course near the entrance to Police Point Park by Bob Frew on February 28th. This Crossbill species has black wings with broad white wing-bars and white tertial tips. Milt Spitzer reported 5 **Red Crossbills** near the Heritage Pavilion at Strathcona Island Park on March 3rd. Red Crossbills lack the white wing-bars. Both species are irruptive migrants, and are dependent on the seeds of conifer cones. The elongated bill with crossed tips identifies both species.

Golden Eagle- Dan Schiebelbein reported 3 Golden Eagles; 1 feeding on a badger carcass in the Bull Trail area, and 2 others on a deer carcass in the Cavan Lake area on February 19th. As was the case here, eagles are usually encountered near or on a carcass, or while soaring in search of prey.

Bohemian Waxwings-have been present at Police Point Park in the past month, but numbers have been erratic, and we have not seen the impressive large flocks of previous winters. The Bohemian Waxwing's larger size and cinnamon-coloured under tail coverts distinguish it from the similar **Cedar Waxwing** which has white under tail coverts. Waxwings are gregarious during migration and winter, and have been observed in mixed flocks usually near berry and fruit producing trees.

Snow Bunting- On a March 4th trip to Manyberries, Milt and Elaine Spitzer reported sighting ~200 buntings along RGE Rd.53 south of Rush Lake. These tundra breeders will soon be headed north, their white plumage heavily tinged with rusty brown in winter, will change to the black and white breeding plumage of spring.

Northern Saw-Whet Owl- Colton Prins reported hearing what he described as a constant "beeping noise", while he was sitting with friends at a campsite fire pit at Writing on Stone Provincial Park after dark on the evening of March 4th. The noise/call continued unabated for several hours. Finally, just before departing for home, Colton with the aid of a headlamp discovered that the noise was a calling Northern Saw-Whet Owl in a nearby tree cavity. Its repetitive call is heard during breeding season from late winter to late spring. Saw-Whet owls are strictly nocturnal, and are smaller than the similar Boreal Owl, but larger than the Northern Pygmy Owl.



Photo by Bob Frew

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

Saturday, March 27 @ 06:00: Annual Manyberries Field Trip: Those participating please meet at the northeast corner of the Walmart parking lot. Please note that with the COVID-19 restrictions there will be no carpooling. Also we will not be stopping at the Stryker's Ranch this year. This trip is conducted annually to observe: from a distance, Sharp-tailed Grouse dancing on their lek, migratory waterfowl arriving from their winter homes, Western Meadowlarks announcing the arrival of spring, Ferruginous Hawks at their usual nesting homes and also what other spring arrivals there may be.

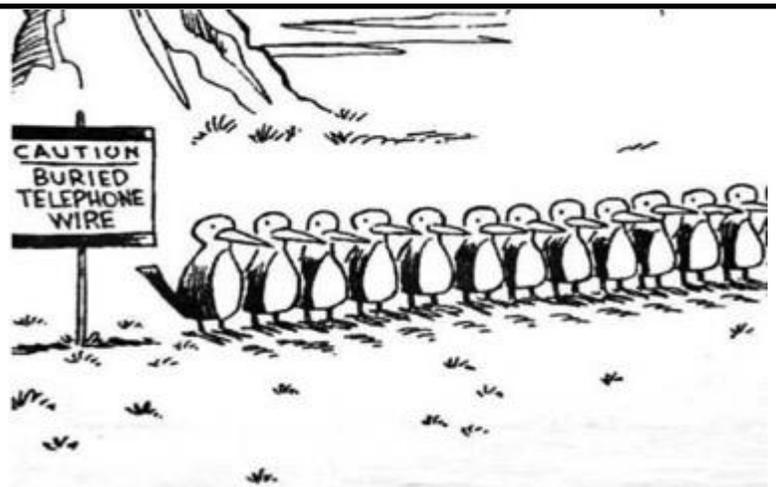
Corlaine Gardner has just read a book entitled "**The Bird Way**" by **Jennifer Ackerman** which she found to be very fascinating and makes us really take a new look at some of the things that we have accepted as standard understanding of birds. The birds that have had most attention are those mostly migratory birds that those of us living north temperate areas encounter. This narrow approach to bird study and observation barely scratches the surface of the variety and complexity of birds.

Following is a quote from the book review by an Audubon representative: "Now Ackerman is back with a new book, *The Bird Way: A Look at How Birds Talk, Work, Play, Parent, and Think*. Instead of focusing solely on bird intelligence, this time Ackerman draws on personal observations and modern research to explore the many different facets of bird life and behavior, and how they can differ from species to species. Split up into five different sections—Talk, Work, Play, Love, and Parent—the book is a captivating and fresh look into the avian world and its many wonders".

If the Medicine Hat Library doesn't have the book perhaps we could suggest that they obtain a copy.

Alberta Invasive Species updated Website by Gerry Ehler

The Alberta Invasive Species Council has an upgraded website: <http://abinvasives.ca> . This site has new awareness and education information and access portals make it more user friendly. They have an expanded package on matters dealing with invasive plants. I will advise them to update their burdock fact sheet to inform pesticide license holders that there is a biological control fungus (Bioherbicide) now registered for this invasive species. I was wondering when we would start to see a fact sheet about "Squeal on Pigs". You can report on EDDs Maps, Alberta. We had them up north and in western Alberta, and hope never to see them in southeastern Alberta. A large part of their diet is forest/riparian underground plant parts, and reports indicate they eat bird eggs, even fish and can overwinter in our climate. Perhaps in their next update we will also see highlighted the domestic rabbit. In Calgary, Winnipeg and Canmore they are/have been a problem. <https://globalnews.ca/news/4425076/calgary-feral-domestic-rabbits> . John Slater and I have seen several domestic rabbits in neighbourhoods and parks where we are doing our buckthorn searches. We have reported our concerns.



March 22 World Water Day! Adopt a Pond!

What better way to celebrate World Water Day than to take a walk around one of the many ponds in and around Medicine Hat! Also there is much to learn on the website of World Water Day. Try it out!

There are four actions required of the household that adopts a pond: 1. Walk around the pond every week or two. 2. Pick up the trash. 3. Report invasive plants on the EDDMaps app (we will help with that). 4. Invite one or two others to do the same.

Some thirty ponds and riparian stretches have been identified. Five households have already chosen their pond or riparian reach. Households are encouraged to adopt close to the place where they live or work, to reduce the CO2 involved in getting there. It's OK if more than one household volunteer for the same pond. The pond will love the reciprocal attention. On the other hand it will be nice to have most of the ponds adopted, so it is a balance.

SEAWA and GN have regular locations they look after; individuals and families are encouraged to participate in their spring and fall clean-ups and weed pulls.

If your household would like to adopt a pond call Martha at 403-526-2226 or 403-878-5973. Note: Weekly Wednesday Walks around various ponds will be announced by email giving the location and start time of the walk. Contact Martha for further information

Mary Anne Ririe adopted a pond and Ian and Angela, Ben White, and I introduced her to the pond on Monday March 8. As we walked around the pond we each picked up a small bag of trash and noticed this and that. The tufted head of a plant puzzled me. Ben came to the rescue with the following identification and information.

"I thought I'd throw together a bit of information about the moss you pointed out on yesterday's walk.

[Prairie Selaginella / Lesser Spikemoss / Little Club-moss](#) (*Selaginella densa*): Was growing on the sandy slopes all around the pond. Very good ground cover, grows on drier, looser soils and helps prevent erosion and retain soil moisture. Found virtually everywhere in the prairies, and even into the mountains from as far as Texas to Alaska. I've attached an excerpt from an ID book published by the Alberta Government that is very good (Kathy Tannas, Common Plants of the Western Rangelands).

It also commonly works alongside lichens to provide ground cover. If you're interested, here is a post from the Royal Alberta Museum about common lichens (#3, [Vagabond Rockfrog Lichen](#) (*Xanthoparmelia camtschadalis*) is most common on prairie soils). [Robbin's Cup Lichen](#) (*Cladonia robbinsii*) is also fairly common in our region.

It's nice to appreciate such a "hide in plain site" sort of plant!"

Ben White Stewardship & Communications Assistant, SEAWA



^ NE Pond adopted by Margie and Johan Booyens.

< Pond adopted by Mary Anne Ririe.



<Junction of the Seven Persons and
Ross Creeks.

This is part of the newly named Dawn
Dickinson riparian park.

Photo by Bruce McLeod

Male White-winged Crossbill >

As detailed in the Exciting Sightings
article in this issue this is an irruptive
species and is dependent on cone crops.
This year has been particularly good for
observing this species.

Photo taken at Medicine Hat Golf Course
by Bob Frew.



<Eastern Screech-Owl

This is an accidental occurrence for the
Medicine Hat area and while this
particular bird has been here for almost
two months his schedule for making
appearances is anything but regular.

Photo by Dan Schiebelbein
dansnaturephotography.com





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
491, 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: _____