

THE SAGEBRUSH CHRONICLE



The Yucca Garden: In Memory of Ben Verner

Ben was an amazing volunteer! Over the decades, he helped the Interpretive Program in more ways than we can list.

One of Ben's interests was the yucca; on the northern edge of its range. Of course that included an interest in the special yucca moth which pollinates the beautiful flowers.

The yuccas that Ben planted behind the Nature Centre back in the 1990s are still going strong. They bloom most years and very occasionally set seed. One of the first years that they set seed, Ben and I opened a pod to see the yucca moth caterpillars. Later, after the caterpillars had chewed their way out to pupate in the ground, we checked the pods and discovered that the caterpillars had eaten some of the seeds but there were many more seeds left. This ancient cooperation works.

Ben also planted several yuccas along the edge of the huge sewer line slash. These went mostly unnoticed for about 10 years until they bloomed!

Ben collected the seeds and started many seedlings over the years. We planted some of them around the group of yuccas along the sewer line. This will become a focus for interpretation and enjoyment. They will emphasize the beauty of native flowers, and highlight the importance of planning for pollinators to keep our world healthy. This will be a long lasting tribute to our very special volunteers.

There have been two work parties, one to fence the area until the seedlings mature. The second was a planting and mulching party. Care of the seedlings will be an ongoing opportunity for involvement. Call the Nature Centre for more information.

Corlaine Gardner

Executive and Board Members

President Phil Horch 403-529-5918
phil.horch@grasslands-naturalists.org
Vice-President Vacant
Secretary Martha Maudsley
Treasurer Angela Turner
angela.turner@grasslands-naturalists.org
Past-President Hugh Armstrong
hugh.armstrong@grasslands-naturalists.org
Directors at
Large 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 family accessible washroom is open:

Each day from 08:00 AM to 8:30 PM

The Nature Centre is open but please observe the COVID restrictions:

Face Masks are Required!

The Nature Center has put out the bird feeders and suet cages for the Fall season of bird feeding! There already has been several bird species spotted at the feeders. Our ever-sweet chickadees, juncos, magpies, downy woodpeckers, ring-necked pheasants, and even the Harris's sparrow have found us!

Our bird-watching window is always available as a warm and unobtrusive corner to spy on and photograph the birds.

Note: Nature Centre Events are detailed in the Events, Trips and Announcement Section of this issue.

Visit the store for your nature related gifts including books, stuffies, comfort birds, bird feeders, and other items

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: Angela Turner

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.

Cover Page Photos and Credits

Top Photo: Yucca in Bloom: photo by Corlaine Gardner.

Middle and Bottom Photos: Preparing the Yucca Garden: Photos by John Slater

Member's Corner

GN welcomes new members **Dorine Armstrong** and **Paul Wright**. Many of us have met Dorine as she participated in the Schuler/McLaren Lakes trip and Paul has volunteered to help with bluebird boxes and bird feeders. It's great to see new members quickly joining in.

Community Spirit Awards

The City of Medicine Hat's Community Spirit Awards have been announced. Of the nine awards this year, three are associated with Grasslands Naturalists and the Interpretive Program. The three are:

Martha Munz Gue will receive the award of excellence for her contributions, since the mid-1970s to a variety of causes, including current commitments to the Grasslands Naturalists, the Southeast Water Alliance and of course her latest initiative, Adopt-a-Pond.

Gerry Ehlert (environment): Gerry, a former rangeland agronomist and professor, will receive a Community Spirit Award for spearheading work on invasive species with the Grasslands Naturalists.

Interpretive Program: (environment) will receive a Community Spirit Award for long standing commitments to education and local programming about the natural world.

This award ceremony was to have been conducted on October 20 but because of COVID restrictions the ceremony will be rescheduled for some time in the spring of 2022.

Notice to all GN Committee Chairpersons: Deadline for Budget Submissions – Nov. 15

This is a reminder that all Committee Chairpersons are required to submit their requests for our 2022 budget to Budget Committee Chairman, Paul Thibault, no later than November 15, 2021. The Budget Committee has the responsibility of building GN's annual operating budget and they can only do this (and include your committee's needs for the coming year) if they receive a submission from each committee. Please review your committee's plans for the coming year and identify its financial needs and e-mail this information to paul.thibault@grasslands-naturalists.org. Failure to submit could result in your committee being without a budget in the coming fiscal year.

Help!!!!!!

The GN is scheduled for a Casino on February 26 and 27, 2022.

Dave Mackenzie has had to step down as our Casino Manager due to health reasons and we are missing at least four previous volunteer workers for various reasons. Therefore we are in **urgent need for someone to step up to take over as Casino Manager and we need a total of 16 volunteers for various duties ranging from Chip Runners, bankers, cashiers, count room supervisors and count room workers.**

This is scheduled once every 14 to 18 months so it does not require a lot of your time. Please respond quickly as there is some preparation and a casino license needs to be looked after. This is one of our major fundraisers and we can't let it slip by.

Contact Hugh Armstrong, Fund Raising Chairman, at:
hugh.armstrong@grasslandsnaturalists.org for more information and to volunteer

President's Report to GN Members, October, 2021

Successful Annual General Meeting – On September 14 over 30 Grasslands Naturalists members gathered outside at Police Point Park to conduct our much-delayed Annual General Meeting. Everyone was safely masked and socially distanced and the weatherman proffered up a lovely fall day.

Elections took place for our executive and for the second consecutive year I was elected as President, Angela Turner was elected as Treasurer, and Martha Maudsley was elected as our new Secretary replacing Betty Rainville who had served faithfully and ably in that role for several years. Unfortunately, Nominating Chairman, John Slater, who conducted the elections was unable to recruit a candidate for the role of Vice President which leaves this position vacant once again.

A board meeting was conducted immediately after the annual meeting to confirm Hugh Armstrong as Past President and appoint Ian Turner and Linda Fisher as board members at large. We still have one vacancy for a board member at large and are looking for someone to emerge. Unfortunately our long-serving Treasurer Eileen Cowtan has had to bow out due to health reasons and her presence is being greatly missed by all of us.

We're Still Battling Covid – As I write this Medicine Hat is in the midst of the worst pandemic outbreak since covid started. The fourth wave is creating a crisis at our local hospital and once again we are dealing with new restrictions, one of which is the cancellation of our hoped-for October GN indoor program. We had tentatively planned to resume indoor program this fall and already had a speaker lined up. We will try again in November if health regulations permit and we are able to meet safely indoors. We are also investigating the possibility of conducting an indoor program as a zoom virtual meeting so watch for details in the November Chronicle. Our speaker has kindly consented to try again in November.

Outdoor Field Trips are still planned – We can still meet safely for outdoor field trips so watch for notices of these via the Chronicle and by e-mail as well. Many of our neighborhood walks have been well attended and we appreciate the fine planning and leadership that has provided by John Slater and Martha Munz Gue. Milt Spitzer has been organizing birding field trips and 14 members participated in the most recent one to McClaren Lake where migrating geese and Sandhill Cranes were observed in good numbers.

Most Incredible Fall Ever? – Many people have been commenting on the gorgeous warm weather we have been experiencing in September and early October. When was the last time we reached 30 degrees in October? My wife Annalora and I travelled to Prince Albert National Park last week and even up at those northern latitudes we experienced gorgeous temperatures and saw plenty of migrating snow geese during our travels. We also had daily encounters with bugling elk as the bulls competed for and defended their cows. We might be tempted to say this is one of the best falls ever except we still seem to be experiencing drought and this ideal fall season might be a symptom of climate change. Nonetheless, after these difficult covid days it is a relief and enjoyment to get outside and make the most of our beautiful fall. I hope you are all keeping well and getting vaccinated if you are medically able. My wife and I are vaxxed and will be getting our booster for a third jab in a couple weeks when we are eligible.



Phil Horch
President

Upcoming Events, Field Trips and Announcements

(Note: All walks and field trips will be conducted under existing COVID-19 Rules. Presently masks are required indoors, and social distancing outdoors).

GN Wednesday Walks:

Wed Oct 13: 10 AM: Riverside NW Trail walk starting at 1st Street & 5th Ave NW.

Wed Oct 20: 10 AM: McCutcheon Trail walk starting McCutcheon Drive & Smythe Ave NW.

Wed Oct 27: 10 AM: Gas City Campground trails starting at the parking lot.

Wed Nov 3: 10 AM: Ranchlands Riparian walk starting at far northeast end Ranchlands Blvd NE.

Wed Nov 10: 10 AM: Harlow Berm Kiwanis River Park starting parking lot at end of Red Deer Drive next to the southeast side of TransCanada Bridge.

Wed Nov 17: 10 AM: Ranchlands Stone Circles walk starting at far northeast end Ranchlands Blvd NE.

Interpretive Program Events:

(Note: Registration is required for the following events. To register, get the time for the event(s), and location call 403 529-6225)

Saturday, October 16 -- Beaver Walk with Marty. An evening stroll looking for beavers.

Tuesday, October 12 (tentatively) -- New "Bats of Alberta" Display will be up in the Main Display area in the Nature Centre

Tuesday, October 19 -- Full Moon Walk with Justine. Come enjoy the full moonlight of the Hunter's Full Moon.

Saturday, October 30 -- Being Batty with Ian. Kids have fun learning about Bats!

Sunday, October 31 -- Halloween StoryWalk® will be up for just one day in Police Point Park!

Sunday, November 7: -- Snow Goose Tour with Ian. Please call for more information.

Nature Conservancy of Canada Volunteer Events:

Date: **Saturday November 13 Time: 10 am – 2 pm**

Location: Peigan Creek (45 minutes SW of Medicine Hat) 49.5724, -110.8197

Volunteers will hand collect sagebrush seed from our Peigan Creek property to support the restoration of prairie grassland on another local conservation property. Volunteers will need to find their own transportation and gloves. Snacks and refreshments provided by NCC.

Date: **Thursday November 18 Time: 10 am – 2 pm**

Location: Haugan (55 minutes S of Medicine Hat) 49.3996, -110.757

Join us as we venture out to the Haugan property to install sage-grouse reflectors on the perimeter fencing, and clean up any old fence clips that have fallen off. Studies have shown that these vinyl clips can reduce bird collisions with fences by a whopping 70 to 80 per cent! The work site is in a very remote location and will require a fair amount of walking through the grassland. Volunteers will need to find their own transportation and gloves. Snacks and refreshments provided by NCC.

To attend either event please RSVP to Kirsten.betteridge@natureconservancy.ca

Specific driving directions and waivers will be sent out closer to the event date.

State of Sage Grouse Habitat:

Following is a link to update you on the Sage Grouse Habitat and Augmentation:

<https://naturealberta.ca/the-state-of-the-greater-sage-grouse/>

Exciting Sightings by Bob Frew

The autumn equinox in late September coincides with the climax of passerine migration in Southeastern Alberta. At this time local avian numbers and diversity decline as they migrate south to their winter ranges. Lingering Yellow-rumped and Orange-crowned Warblers, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, and several sparrow species continue to be reported into October. A final local migration spectacle can be anticipated later this month with the possible staging of large numbers of Snow Geese at Sauder Reservoir and Murray Lake. Fall can also be a good time to encounter rare migrants. Exciting sightings reported last month include the following:

Magnolia Warbler- This eastern wood warbler breeds in our boreal coniferous forests, and is an uncommon sighting in the west during migration. George Koopmans observed a rather late male Magnolia Warbler on September 12th along the Seven Person's Creek bike path just south of Dunmore Road. It was in the company of a couple of Palm Warblers and a large number of Yellow-rumped Warblers.

Sabine's Gull- is a pelagic species that breeds in the high arctic, and winters at sea. All ages are recognized by their distinctive black-gray-white triangular wing patterns, and notched tail (juveniles have a black tail-bar). Sightings are rare in the western interior in fall. Milt and Elaine Spitzer observed a juvenile Sabine's gull among a group of 10 Ring-billed gulls on the gravel beds of the South Saskatchewan River across from Police Point Park on the morning of September 14th. The gull stayed for about 90 minutes before flying off. The Sabine's gull is very tern-like in flight.

White-winged Scoter- This sea duck is found on inland lakes in the breeding season, and departs for coastal areas in late October. The male has a white crescent shaped facial marking below the eye. Distinctive white wing-patches in both sexes are clearly observed in flight. Bob Frew observed a pair of scoters at Elkwater Lake on October 5th. Breeding has been confirmed in the Cypress Hills.

Eastern Screech Owl- Update on a screech owl sighting first reported by Dan Schiebelbein early this year on January 17th alongside the South Saskatchewan River; the owl was re-sighted numerous times by local and visiting birders over the ensuing months, including a sighting on August 26th. The owl(s) appeared to be using three separate roosting sites within a relatively small area. The most recent sighting was reported by Dan on September 17th, eight months after his initial sighting. Construction has now started in the area immediately adjacent to the owl's present roosting cavity, and unfortunately this rare Eastern Screech Owl will have to move on.

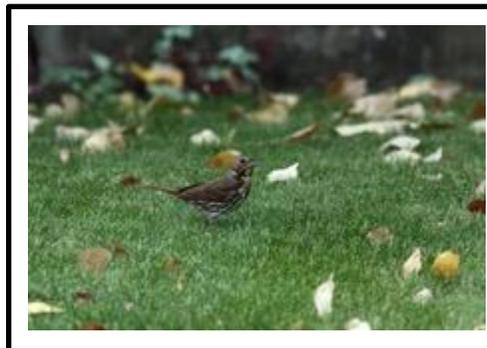
Broad-winged Hawk- In Alberta, this crow-size woodland buteo breeds in a narrow east-west strip in the southern boreal forest, and also in the Cypress Hills. It is uncommon, but during fall migration large numbers can often be seen travelling in "kettles" using thermals to gain altitude. Its black and white tail bars are distinctive. Bob Frew observed two juvenile birds on September 14th at Police Point Park.

Sanderling- Sightings of this long distance migrant were reported at Sauder Reservoir by local birders in early September. Sanderlings in nonbreeding plumage are very pale overall; light gray above and white below, with a blackish mark at the shoulder. Juveniles are spangled with black and white above. Sanderlings are larger than other peeps. These Sauder sightings appeared to be juveniles.

Townsend's Solitaire- This brownish-gray thrush with a white eye ring, and buffy wing patches is common in our mountain parks. It often wanders eastward into the prairie region during fall migration. Bob Frew observed a solitaire at Police Point Park on September 21st, and Milt Spitzer reported another on September 26th, also in the park.



Sparrow species- Dan Schiebelbein observed a Fox Sparrow in his NE Crescent Heights garden on October 5th. This large sparrow forages in a towhee-like manner kicking around dead leaves and other ground litter. Two or three subspecies are found in the province and are considered vagrants in Southeastern Alberta. Milt Spitzer reported two Harris's Sparrows at Police Point Park on October 6th; this species is a rare migrant and winter visitor. Other sparrow species recently reported include; White-throated, White-crowned, Lincoln's, and American Tree Sparrow.



American Pipit- Sauder Reservoir is a reliable place to see American Pipits each fall, and this fall was no exception. Several GN birders reported migrating pipits on the Sauder Reservoir levee during the month of September. Pipits are streaked brown birds with white outer tail feathers, buffy eyebrows, and thin bills. They walk instead of hopping, and wag their tails. In summer this species is found in Arctic and alpine tundra.



Sharp-shinned Hawk- This is the smallest of Alberta's three accipiter species. Accipiters have long tails and short, rounded wings, and are uniquely adapted for hunting in woodlands. In the field, the Sharp-shinned Hawk can be confused with the similar Cooper's Hawk. Sharp-shinned Hawk sightings were reported by several local birders in the latter part of September, and the first week of October at Police Point Park.

White-breasted Nuthatch- This species is considered rare in southeastern Alberta, and sightings can be unpredictable. It is usually first detected by its distinctive nasal "yank" call. Phil Horch observed a single bird at

Police Point Park on October 7th.

Photos: Top right: Fox Sparrow with Dark-eyed Juncos; Above right: Sharp-shinned Hawk. Photos by: dansnaturephotography.com.

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



Panoramic view of Police Point Park taken from the river cliffs by Ian Turner

GN Field Trip to Schuler and McLaren Lakes on September 25, 2021

We had a great turnout for this trip in that 14 members met at the Medalta Parking Lot at 08:30 but unfortunately because of COVID protocols we were unable to car pool and thus we had a cavalcade of 8 vehicles. With so many vehicles we decided that we wouldn't stop along Highway 41 but would rather report individuals' sightings when we pulled off the highway unto the secondary gravel roads on the way to Schuler. As it turned out everyone was able to see the perched Golden Eagle along the highway and most saw the Ferruginous Hawk also perched on a fence post. Some members saw a Red Fox and others reported a falcon species.

Driving along the gravel roads approaching the village of Schuler all were able to see Western Meadowlarks, Horned Larks and two Northern Harriers. Some saw a small flock of Gray Partridges. We stopped on the north side of Schuler Lake, which had extremely low water levels, and where we had an interview with an immature Northern Harrier while it was hunting the marsh grasses very close to our parked vehicles. On the far side of the lake we had distant scope views of 3 Sandhill Cranes. Too far to identify were numerous ducks and what appeared to be Dowitchers. Because of the low water levels and the large number of vehicles we forewent driving up the trail on the east side of the lake but as we drove on the east side of Schuler we did observe Savannah Sparrows, Horned Larks and Meadowlarks..

From Schuler we continued east towards McLaren Lake. As we neared the Lake we could see many Canada Geese taking off from the harvested fields and flying in large flocks in the sky. Unfortunately we didn't see the large flocks of Sandhill Cranes that we expected would be feeding in the fields. Fortunately this disappointment was soon dispelled as at the lake itself we observed a large number of cranes feeding on the southeast shore. On the water were several thousand Canada Geese and an estimated 500 White-fronted Geese which, unfortunately, were at a distance only really observable through the scopes. Mingled among these geese were 5 Snow Geese and numerous duck species as well as a few Eared Grebes. After feasting our eyes on the waterfowl we decided it was time to have our lunch repast in the McLaren Lake Regional Park. We lingered over lunch basking in the warmth of the sun in temperature that reached 28C. with very light winds.

After lunch, participants scattered like they were going on an old time land rush each heading pell-mell in all directions and at great speed. Running a birding trip in the park was like herding cats (as Phil Horch would say). In any event a good number of passerine species were observed including a Great Horned Owl, several sparrow species, a Blue Jay, American Kestrel, Merlins, American Robins, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Yellow-rumped Warblers and potentially a glimpse of a Fox Sparrow but it wasn't seen well enough to include on our list. In all during the trip 48 species of birds were tallied. Mammals seen on the trip included a Red Fox, two Coyotes, a Jackrabbit, 15 Mule Deer and 4 Pronghorns.

With the great weather, the super companionship and significant bird sightings; a good time was had by all.



Litter Clean up by John Slater

On Saturday September 18th, five GN members participated in a litter clean up of Ranchlands Environmental Reserve followed by a great walk of the Escarpment trail slope (see picture). On our return by the river, we happened upon a Bull snake. This area is much cleaner than previous years, but still needs constant attention near the end of Ranchlands Blvd NE due to ongoing construction in Ranchlands Phase 3A&B.

On Wednesday Sept 22nd, eight GN members did a clean up of Strathcona Island Park followed by an enjoyable walk in Donna MacLean Nature area and picnic lunch near the Heritage Bldg pond. As well as over the next two days, the south side of the river shoreline from the TransCanada Trail Pavilion as far upstream as the MH Public Library plus the area in Harlow near the TransCanada Bridge was cleaned. Over 10 bags of trash including a discarded golf club bag were removed from the river shoreline (see pictures).

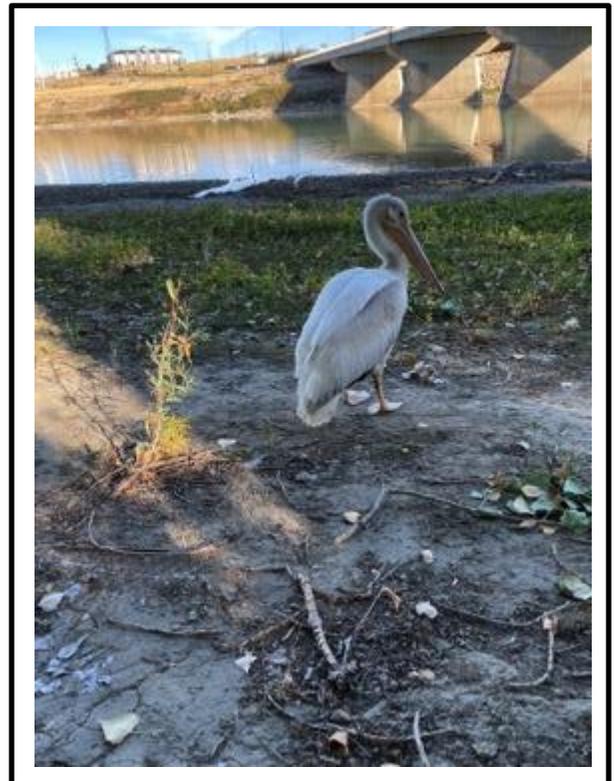


Photos on Left Side:

- Bull Snake
 - Hiking the Escarpment Trail
 - Accumulated Litter
- (Photos by John Slater)

Pelican Joe at Bottom Right

(Photo by Paula Munro)
This Lone Pelican has been trailing fisherman and dog walkers at close range. Often swimming close to shore or even walking along with them.



Bat Box Monitoring

If you have a bat box scientists want to know about it!

Bats in Canada face multiple threats from habitat loss and disease. A bat box is a simple way to provide additional roosting habitat for bats, yet little is known about bat box use in Canada. Information on bat box use is especially important as three bat species in Canada are listed as endangered: little brown bats, northern long-eared bats, and tricolored bats.

If you have a bat box and would like to participate in this study, please fill out this online multiple-choice survey with questions about your bat box. Your participation is important even if your box does not have any bats! https://trentu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_86og8C3MIgO2ff7

This project is in partnership with the Wildlife Conservation Society and the Canadian Wildlife Federation. More information on the project is posted here: <https://wcsbats.ca/Our-work-to-save-bats/Batbox-Project/BatBox-Project-Canada-wide> and here <https://rrvfn.org/canadian-bat-project/>

Karen J. Vanderwolf, Research Assistant, New Brunswick Museum

Mary Blomgren and Nolan Gaglac, Conservation Corps Volunteers Their Penultimate Day at the Nature Centre

As a windup to Mary and Nolan's activities with the Interpretive Program and Grasslands Naturalists they took the group, assembled below, on a walk through Police Point Park to view the effectiveness of the goat control of the leafy spurge and as well talked about other invasive plants in the park. The group also viewed, at their leisure, a display of programs that Mary and Nolan were involved in during their sojourn at the Nature Centre.



Photo by Martha Maudsley