

THE SAGEBRUSH CHRONICLE



Police Point Park Medicine Hat's Treasure!

**A Look at Past Events that Made
this Park a Special Place!**

Presentation by Bob Townsend

Long time resident and Grasslands Naturalists member Bob Townsend will outline the genesis of Police Point Park both prior to 1972 and from 1972 to present. **You'll be surprised at what is revealed!**

As a Boy Scout in the 1950's Bob used the Police Point area for his many activities and adventures. Bob has worked as a Provincial Park Interpreter, a teacher, an outdoor education coordinator, a member of the River Valley Authority and as a valued member of the Police Point Interpretive Program Operations Committee for over 20 years.

Tuesday, April 26: Zoom Meeting

- 7:00 PM to 7:50 PM: Business Meeting
- 8:00 PM to 9:00 PM: Presentation by Bob Townsend

Note: Several days before this zoom meeting an email will be sent to all members detailing the specific instructions to join this zoom meeting.

Executive and Board Members

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

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MH Interpretive Program

(Managed by Grasslands Naturalists)
Based in Police Point Park

www.natureline.info

Nature Line: (403) 529-6225

Facebook and Instagram: @policepointpark

The Nature Centre is open year round from:
9:00AM to 5:00PM Tuesday through Sunday

Ukrainian Egg Decorating Kits for Sale

Until Supplies Run Out: Come down to the Nature Centre to purchase your own Ukrainian Egg Decorating Kit! Kits are \$27 and include: 4 dyes, a locally handmade kitska, and a puck of wax.

Earth Day Bash in Police Point Park

April 23: 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM: Celebrate Earth Day with us! Travel around the park to 5 interpretive stations to complete an activity and receive a stamp in your special Earth Day Passport! Completed passports will be entered into a draw for a prize.

Events for May are not finalized as Yet but so far include:

Saturday, May 14: Birding 101: call the Natureline (403 529-6225) for more details and for newly planned event details.

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 (**Zoom Meetings only until further notice**), 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!

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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.

Visit the Nature Centre Store for Nature slanted gifts including books, birdfeeders, bird houses, stuffies, comfort birds, and more.

Member's Corner

Exciting News! **Martha Munz Gue and Gerry Elhert** as well as the **Interpretive Program** will be receiving Community Spirit Awards at the Esplanade on May 19. More information will be forthcoming in the May Chronicle. Also very exciting news for **Grasslands Naturalists** as we have been shortlisted for the Emerald Award, the winner of which will be announced in Calgary in June. See Phil Horch's President's Report following for more details regarding these accolades.

Another reminder! It is time to renew your GN Membership for 2022. The membership renewal/waiver form is at the back of this Chronicle. Dues are detailed on page 2 of this issue. Renewals can be dropped off at the Nature Centre or can be mailed to **Grasslands Naturalists, Box 2491, Medicine Hat, AB, T1A 8G8.**

President's Report To GN Members: April 2022

It can be argued that spring is the favorite season of the year for most naturalists. It's the season of beginnings. We look forward to the first migrating birds, the first crocus bloom, the first ground squirrel emerging from its burrow, the first open water, the first butterfly and the longer hours of daylight. It's the season of optimism. It means more hours to walk, birdwatch, bike, kayak and live outdoors. Hopefully, it's also a time when we can see an end to pandemic, war, bad economic news, and natural tragedies. (Sigh) Maybe that's being a little too optimistic.

Anyway, nature helps us all to put things into perspective and helps to bring peace to our soul in times of turmoil.

Honors have come to GN & Its Members

Your Grasslands Naturalists Society has also become the bearer of good news. The City of Medicine Hat's Community Spirit Awards, which were postponed due to the pandemic, have been re-scheduled for Thursday, May 19 at the Esplanade with a reception starting at 6:30 p.m. followed by a presentation ceremony at 7:00 p.m. Members of the public are welcome to attend. I especially urge all GN members to attend because our society is a big winner. Gerry Ehlert, Martha Gue and our own Medicine Hat Interpretive Program have all been awarded in different categories. Come and help us celebrate the magnificent efforts of Grasslands Naturalists whose work is being recognized by our broader community!

In addition to that, we have been notified that the Grasslands Naturalists Society has been short-listed as a candidate to win the coveted Emerald Award which is a province-wide recognition for work done in the environmental field. The winner will be announced at a ceremony on June 1st in the new Public Library in Calgary. I and my wife Annalora, along with David and Martha Gue, will be attending the ceremony on behalf of GN and hopefully may also see our society declared as a winner. However, just to be short-listed is an honour itself!

Can you help with issues?

However, we cannot rest on our laurels. Defending our natural heritage is a never-ending struggle. There are many issues that continue need our attention. The massive irrigation projects that are underway in southern Alberta have impacts on our disappearing natural grasslands. The massive new solar and windfarms planned for southern Alberta likewise need careful scrutiny as they gobble up food-producing agricultural land and also impact native prairie. The struggle against invasive species and the landscape disturbances that encourage them has been another priority for us to deal with. The list goes on. I say this to encourage you to join our issues committee who need more members to help study and monitor issues such as these and others.

Is Medicine Hat A Bird Friendly City?

Another matter that our society has initiated is to urge the City of Medicine Hat to join other cities in our country that are on a path to become Bird Friendly Cities. Five cities have already been certified as such. We have formed a Bird Team in partnership with Nature Canada who developed this program, and I have sent a proposal to Merette Heggelund, Medicine Hat's Acting City Manager, urging our city to join this initiative. We are waiting for an official response. If you are interested in supporting this effort the Bird Team is looking for a few more members.

Continued on next Page

You're Invited To An Art Show

There is another event coming up that all GN members are invited to attend. Grasslands Naturalists and SEAWA (Southeast Alberta Watershed Alliance) have joined forces to hold an art show at the TREX Space, Downtown at the corner of 3rd Street and 5th Avenue. The theme for this art show is "Ponds, Coulees and Creeks". Over 30 artists are participating so this is an opportunity to see a wonderful display of local talent. The artwork will be on display from April 19-June 15 every workday from 12 noon to 5 p.m. There will be an opening reception on EARTH DAY, April 22 to which all GN and SEAWA members are invited. Civic dignitaries have also been invited and many of the artists will be in attendance. We hope to see you there!

Help Needed For the Spring Trade Show

Another event taking place on April 22-24 is the annual Spring Trade Show sponsored by our local Chamber of Commerce. The Grasslands Naturalists and SEAWA have joined forces in order to publicize our societies. So far we only have two volunteers who have agreed to help man our booth. We would like at least 3 or 4 more who could share in taking turns at our booth. If you are able to devote 3 or 4 hours over this weekend to help out, please give me a call at 403-529-5918 or reach me on my e-mail address phil.horch@grasslands-naturalists.org. This is an opportunity to make thousands of Medicine Hatters aware of our society and what we do and maybe even an opportunity to recruit a few new members.

GN's Annual Meeting is on June 28

This is one more reminder to our members that our GN Annual General Meeting has been moved to June 28 which may be outdoors or indoor depending upon the COVID situation. There is still time to nominate individuals for our executive. The deadline for nominations is April 30th. Nominations may be sent to Martha Munz-Gue our pro-tem Vice-President or to myself. Those of you who are committee chairpersons should submit your annual reports to Paul Thibault for publication on our GN website by April 30 as well.

As you can see, for a small society, we have a big agenda. The pandemic has been a big impediment to carrying on activities as usual. However, the needs of our natural world have only become bigger and more pressing. It takes committed volunteers to make a difference in a democracy and GN has been a big difference maker! However, our societies magnificent tradition can only continue if every member gets involved and if we can excite the next generation to join our mission. We are always looking for more help and more ideas. Please consider where you can fit in and make a difference. Enjoy our beautiful spring in the grasslands!

Phil Horch: President

Earth Day: April 22 Events

An opening reception for the "Ponds, Coulees, and Creeks" show TREX will be held on Earth Day from 3:00 to 8:00 PM. It is a come-and-go event where you can meet participating artists, GN and SEAWA leaders and special guests. This is a social event with NO food nor drink. You may bring your own beverage if you so wish. The "Ponds, Coulees, and Creeks" art show will be open to the public beginning on April 19 and will run to mid June.

As a follow up to Earth Day, on April 23 GN and SEAWA are hosting a field day at Connaught Pond from 09:00 AM to Noon. This field day will include: wildflower and native plant identification, a demonstration on propogating plains cottonwoods and how to care for the plains cottonwood trees that were planted last summer. EDDMaps App mentoring will also be provided.

Upcoming Events, Field Trips and Announcements

Wednesday Walks all starting at 10am.

April 13: Saratoga Park, South Railway St. SE, bottom of Scholten Hill.

April 20: Kin Coulee Park, north side of Seven Persons Creek, Lorne Ball Diamond.

April 27: Ross Glen Nature Park, Trail from East Glen Drive SE to search for Prairie Crocus.

May 4: Strathcona Island Park, Dawn Dickinson Nature Park, meet at small parking lot on Hwy 41A north side of Seven Persons Creek crossing.

May 11: Tepee and Saamis Coulee, parking lot by tepee.

GN Spring Cleanup Events, all starting at 9am:

Friday April 22: Earth Day Cleanup of Ajax Coulee, meet at Lorne Ball Diamond.

Tuesday April 26: SE Hill Trail, meet at east end of 11ST SE.

Saturday April 30: Ranchlands, meet at far northeast end of Ranchlands Blvd NE. **City Litter Blitz BBQ noontime at Parks Dept, Kin Coulee Park.**

Spring Trade Show from April 22 to 24

Contact Phil Horch if you are able to assist in manning the booth for a period of time. Contact Phil at: 403 529-5918 or be email at: phil.horch@grasslands-naturalists.org.

GN Field Trip to Sauder's/Murray Reservoirs:

Saturday, April 30: Meet at the Gershaw Drive A&W at 08:00 AM: This trip is being led by Phil Horch and he indicates those that wish can purchase sausages on a bun at the Premium Sausage outlet at Seven Persons or alternately one can bring their own lunch. The trip should end about 1:00 PM.

Future Trip Announcement:

Saturday June 4: Advanced notice for Environmental Week. Tour of Paul & Twyla von Huene Property and Ross Greek south of Irvine. After tour starting at 10am, you are invited to bring your picnic lunch and continue exploring in the afternoon. Watch for details in May Chronicle and on GN Website.

Interpretive Program Events:

See page 2 of this Chronicle for details concerning April and the first part of May planned events.

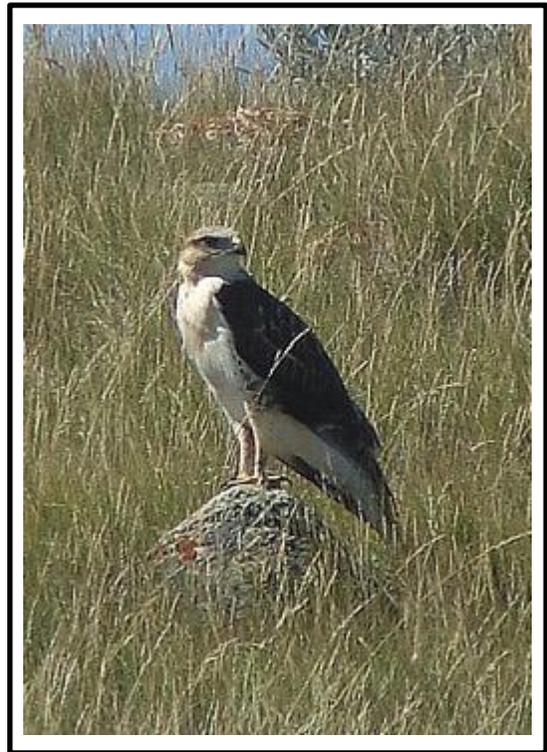
Carol Porter Bluebird Trail Monitoring

A couple of the long term monitors along this trail find that they will not be able to assist this year. This trail lies primarily along Eagle Butte Road to Wildcat Road and westward for a distance past Michelle Reservoir along this road. The boxes are visited every week but it is so scheduled that each volunteer only has to do 5 trips during the year on an every 3rd week basis. Duties include: ensuring boxes are in good condition, counting eggs and or young during the breeding process, and cleaning out the box when the fledging is complete. If interested contact Milt Spitzer for more details at: 403 528-3120 or milton.spitzer@gmail.com.

Exciting Sightings

As we move through the month of April, avian spring migration is upon us. Ferruginous Hawks, Mountain Bluebirds, and Western Meadowlarks have already returned to their Southeastern Alberta breeding range. North-bound waterfowl, including Tundra Swans, Snow Geese and various duck species have been reported at our local reservoirs, lakes, and wetlands, which are now ice-free. Departing winter visitors such as Rough-legged Hawks, Northern Shrikes, and Snowy Owls do not linger long in returning to their northern breeding ranges. We can anticipate more exciting bird sightings and song as spring migration progresses. Some exciting sightings reported so far this spring include the following:

Ferruginous Hawk- This hawk is found in the grasslands region of the province, where sparsely treed mixed grass prairie provides ideal habitat, and an abundance of prey for nesting buteo species. The largest of Alberta's hawks, the species was once on Alberta's Blue List and classified as endangered, but is now considered to be recovering. During the April 2nd GN field trip to the Manyberries/Pakowki Lake area, birders encountered good numbers of Ferruginous Hawks. Light-phased Ferruginous Hawks are identified by their white bodies, and reddish-brown shoulders, back and rumps, and an all-white tail. Milt Spitzer reported a FOY sighting of a pair of Ferruginous Hawks along RGE Rd. 84, north of the Hamlet of Whitla on March 25th.



Ferruginous Hawk: Photo by R. Frew

Mountain Bluebird- This species arrives in Southern Alberta before most other passerine migrants, usually in late March/early April and is considered a harbinger of spring. The males' all blue plumage makes it highly detectable, and distinguishes it from rare Eastern or Western Bluebirds. The species is a cavity nester and is often seen around nest boxes along the "Carol Porter Bluebird Trail" in the Cypress Hills. This spring's first sightings were reported by Dan Schiebelbein who encountered 9 Mountain Bluebirds on March 25th along the Jackpot Rd. and Eagle Butte Rd. in the Cypress Hills. They were all males and were seen along the fence lines flying from post to post and down to the ground foraging for emerging insects.

Waterfowl- Phil and Annalora Horch visited Murray Lake on March 26th, and were surprised to see significant portions of the lake open and ice-free. Among the species they reported were ~600 **Common Goldeneye**, ~100 **Canvasbacks**, and 47 **Tundra Swans**. Further species observed were; 10 **American Wigeon**, 3 **Lesser Scaup**, 1 **Ring-necked Duck**, 12 **Northern Pintail** and 6 **Redhead**. Identification is easier in spring when ducks are in breeding plumage as illustrated in field guides.

Red-breasted Merganser- The reddish breast band, white collar and shaggy double pointed crest of the male Red-breasted Merganser distinguish it from the other merganser species. George Koopmans reported 11 Red Breasted Mergansers on Murray Lake right up close to the dam on April 2nd. Rob and Corlaine Gardner reported considerable numbers (>50) of Red-breasted Mergansers scattered across the visible part of Sauder Reservoir on April 6th. There is only a short window of time each spring in which to see this species passing through to its northern breeding territory.

Continued on next page

Great Blue Heron- Bob Frew sighted a single heron at the heronry across the river, just downstream from Police Point Park on March 22nd. Since that date, new arrivals have increased the number to >20.

Hooded Merganser- This is smallest of our three merganser species and is a fast and agile flyer. The colorful male has a white crest, which is conspicuous and fan shaped when raised. Hooded Mergansers are considered uncommon to rare in the prairie region, and share similar habitat requirements with our other merganser species. Dan Schiebelbein reported a single male Hooded Merganser at Spoonhandle Dam and a single female Hooded Merganser at Seven Persons Lake on April 8th.

Varied Thrush- Barry and Judy Anderson reported this thrush species in their friendly Ross Glen yard throughout the day on April 9th. In the mountain and foothills natural regions where it breeds, the Varied Thrush (with its unique and mournful whistle) is more often heard than seen. Sightings in the prairie region are rare, and usually occur during migration. The male's grayish-blue nape and back, orange eyebrow stripe, and black breast band distinguish it from the similar American Robin.



Varied Thrush: Photo by B. Anderson

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



Ruddy Duck



Lesser Scaup



Wood Duck



White-winged Scoter

Ben Verner's Memorial Trip to the Manyberries Area: April 2, 2022

Sixteen participants set out slightly after 6:00 AM, in a seven vehicle cavalcade, with visions of Sharp-tailed Grouse dancing in their heads. Unfortunately Ben's magic was not with us because when we arrived at the lek to view the courtship display we instead found six lumps of lethargic grouse barely moving making them hard to distinguish from actual lumps of mud and weeds. We also found the area southwest of Manyberries to be extremely dry (the driest the author has ever seen in his participation on this trip over the past 12 years) such that there was no standing water in any of the flood irrigation works with the result that there were no flocks of waterfowl milling about.

We did however encounter a good number of Ferruginous Hawks (10+), a few Rough-legged Hawks and two Northern Harriers (one doing its courtship display). A surprise was an early Brewer's Blackbird in a small flock of Red-winged Blackbirds. On our way south towards Highway 501 we found a Great Horned Owl sitting on her nest; we were to see an additional four occupied Great Horned Owl nests during the remainder of our trip.

Having found no waterfowl in the Manyberries area we decided to head westward to Pakowki Lake. The water level in this lake is also very low but there was sufficient water to contain a number of duck species including: Mallard, Green-winged Teal, American Shoveler, Lesser Scaup, Northern Pintail, Canvasback, Bufflehead and Common Goldeneye. We also had two small flocks of Tundra Swans fly overhead. On the way over to the marsh at the west end of Pakowki Lake we found a late Snowy Owl. At the marsh there were no new waterfowl seen but a highlight of the trip was the sighting of two Golden Eagles (two Bald Eagles were previously seen along the route). We also encountered several more Ferruginous and Rough-legged Hawks.

We ended the trip at Murray Lake where no new species were added but additional views of previously seen waterfowl were made. Dan discovered a dead Snowy Owl washed up on the shore. This was another disconcerting part of the trip as previously in some bush Dan had discovered a number of snares a couple of which had long dead coyotes entangled in them and one very much alive coyote struggling to get free. Several of the gents managed to free this poor animal. While snares are unfortunately legal to use they are also supposed to be tended every 48 hours, which was certainly not the case here. Not only that but this is a most inhumane and immoral way to treat animals.

In all we tallied 37 bird species as well as several Porcupines and large numbers of Mule and White-tailed Deer as well as Pronghorns.



**Left: dark phased Ferruginous Hawk: Photo by: Jannie Vanderhaar.
Top: Breeding pair of Great Horned Owls; Photo by Ian Turner**



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



Membership Form for 2022

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

Payments can be made by cheque, cash or using e-Transfer at memberships@grasslands-naturalists.org

*Current and recent Chronicles can be viewed and downloaded from the Grasslands Naturalists website www.grasslands-naturalists.org. **Regardless of payment option used, a signed membership form must be filled out and submitted.***

* 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: _____