

THE SAGEBRUSH CHRONICLE



Managing for Biodiversity in Western Canada: by Local Rancher Hyland Armstrong



Hyland will discuss why it is important as a rancher/farmer to manage for biodiversity on your land. He will share his findings of a collaboration between himself and multiple wildlife and nature groups and 2 Alberta provincial department officials over a 5 year time frame, on a project whose goal it was to improve range health on a ranch lease south of the Cypress Hills and monitor the response of a variety of mammals, birds and amphibian species living there. Past GN member Dawn Dickinson played a role as an observer of this research.



Hyland acquired both his Bachelor of Science Degree in Animal Science and his Masters of Science Degree in Plant Ecology from the University of Saskatchewan. He also has 30 plus years of ranching experience added to his above expertise.

Over the years Hyland has enjoyed working alongside the Nature Conservancy of Canada, Cows and Fish, Ducks Unlimited, Alberta Fish and Wildlife Association, Alberta Conservation Association, Alberta Public Lands and Alberta Environment and Parks.

Tuesday, September 27: At the Nature Centre:

7:00 to 7:50 PM: Business Meeting; 8:00 to 9:00 PM Presentation by Hyland Armstrong.

The GN Executive Board voted at the September 6 Board meeting that from this point onwards GN will return to in-person general meetings to be held at the Nature Centre in Police Point Park. All up to date Alberta Health guidelines will be followed. We urge members attending in person meetings to also follow all up to date Alberta Health guidelines. The air ventilation system inside the theatre is poor. Please feel comfortable wearing an appropriate mask.

At the AGM in June members indicated a desire for a Zoom hybrid option to either attend the general meetings in person or view via Zoom from home. The Tech Team is hard at work to enable this to happen - stay tuned for further email updates for the September 27 meeting.

Executive and Board Members

President Phil Horch 403-529-5918

phil.horch@grasslands-naturalists.org

Vice-President Martha Munz Gue, Pro Tem.

Secretary Martha Maudsley

Treasurer Angela Turner

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Past-President Hugh Armstrong

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Directors at

Large Ian Turner

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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

Come down and meet Bandit, our ambassador **bull snake**! She's visiting the Nature Centre until the beginning of October.
Ssssssssuper cool!

Sept 25 from 1-3 pm - Métis Kitchen Party

Come enjoy Métis dancing, fiddlers, and fire-cooked bannock. Hosted in Police Point Park by the Miywasin Friendship Centre. No registration required.

Oct 15 (Evening) - City-wide Haunted Scavenger Hunt

An evening of spookiness for ages 18+. Tickets are \$15 per person and can be purchased in advance from the Nature Centre. Call for more information.

Keep an eye on our social media pages to register online for our upcoming **partner events** (eg. Painting with PainterGirl, Yoga in the Park, and the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Alberta (APEGA) public event).

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

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

General Meetings: 4th Tuesday, Sept. to May **Board Meetings:** 1st Tuesday Sept. to 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 403-529-6225

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.



MHIP Trade Show Booth

Visit the Nature Centre for nature related gifts.

Member's Corner

The Grasslands Naturalists would like to acknowledge the receipt of a grant in the amount of \$830 from the Community Foundation of Southeastern Alberta "**Donna MacLean Grasslands Naturalists Fund**" in June, 2022. We appreciate all that Donna did for the Grasslands Naturalists organization and for setting up this fund to support our society for years to come.

We have had a number of additional new members to Grasslands Naturalists over the summer. They are: **Brenda Stuart; Dale and Marilyne Leckie, and Jurrie and Maureen Mellema.** Welcome to the Society and we hope that your membership will meet your expectations. We look forward to meeting you at our monthly meetings, or at our weekly walks or perhaps on a field trip or two.

Upcoming Events, Field Trips and Announcements

Wednesday Walks all starting at 10:00 AM (finished before or by noon).

September 14: Walk in Ranchlands riparian forest; meet at far end of Ranchlands Blvd. NE.

September 21: Walk in Strathcona Island Park; meet at the Heritage Pavilion.

September 28: Walk at Connaught Pond; Meet at the parking lot by the pond or along Primrose Drive, west side near the Medicine Hat College Student Residence. Explore the restoration experiments and perhaps help with the Crested Wheat versus Western Wheat Grass Challenge.

October 5: Somerset Street Pond. Come to see how this area is being overrun by Russian Olive.

October 12: Somerside Pond behind Canadian Tire. Invite clubs, families or schools/classrooms/councils to visit the area and perhaps consider adopting the pond.

Fall Field Trips

Saturday, September 24: Trip to the Great Sandhills and McLaren Lake to view the scenery at the hills and to hopefully observe the spectacle of migrating waterfowl. Meet at the Medalta Parking lot at **7:00 AM** where we can carpool. This is an all day trip so bring a lunch and suitable apparel. We will be back by about **5:00 PM.**

Saturday, October 15: Phil Horch led trip to Sauder's Reservoir to observe late fall migrants. Meet at the A&W Gershaw Drive parking lot at **8:00 AM.** We will stop at Premium Sausage, Seven Persons for lunch and should be back to the A&W by **1:00 PM.**

Medicine Hat Interpretive Program Events:

Sept 25 from 1-3 pm - Métis Kitchen Party: Come enjoy Métis dancing, fiddlers, and fire-cooked bannock. Hosted in Police Point Park by the Miywasin Friendship Centre. No registration required.

Oct 15 (Evening) - City-wide Haunted Scavenger Hunt; An evening of spookiness for ages 18+. Tickets are \$15 per person and can be purchased in advance from the Nature Centre. Call for more information

Other Agency Events:

Wednesday, September 14: Methanex Community Day: You are invited to an open house at the Methanex Medicine Hat facility from 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM. 3806 Box Springs Road NW. Events include: a Charity BBQ from 11:00 AM to 2:00 PM; guided plant tours every 30 minutes (must wear closed toe shoes and be 10 years old or older); Emergency Response Team demonstrations; displays; connect with the Methanex Community Advisory Panel, and activities for children from Praxis Science Outreach Society and Safety City.

Saturday, September 24: Connaught Pond from 9:30 to 11:30 AM: SEAWA Public Education Restoration Activity. Involves the removal of Crested Wheat Grass where Western Wheat Grass is present. Meet at the parking lot by the Pond or along Primrose Drive, west side near the Medicine Hat College Residence.

President's Report To GN Members September 2022

Fall is here and a new season brings the start of our Grasslands Naturalists indoor program. If COVID doesn't rear its ugly head again, we hope to offer you a hybrid indoor program on September 27. You can either attend in person at the Nature Center or participate virtually from home via zoom. Since we have never done this before we appreciate your forbearance as we try something new. Our small meeting room isn't ideal because of its size and lack of ventilation but if we are through the worst of COVID and you are vaccinated we leave it up to you to decide how you wish to enjoy our indoor program. Feel free to wear a mask if you decide to attend in person.

I hope you have had a healthy and active summer. Thousands of Canadians took to the road or air in the past couple months and the travel scene has been busy. Annalora and I spent five weeks on a road trip that included a week in Jasper as well as a week on Haida Gwaii. We also visited 38 family members in 14 separate visits and managed to stay healthy. It virtually felt like pre-COVID days though we know the virus is still present and may not be entirely done yet. Our first ever trip to Haida Gwaii was amazing!

I look forward to seeing you at our upcoming meeting either in person or online. We all would like to hear what exciting sightings you have seen this summer. Come prepared to start a new naturalist season."

Phil Horch
President



Photos on Left from Wednesday Walk 7 Sept 2022, GN/SEAWA Adopt-A-Pond, Creek and Path Walk with City Environmental Staff who have adopted a section of Seven Persons Creek and Trail from College Ave to Dunmore Road. Kevin Redden is Director of the City's Environmental, Land & Government Relations Department responsible for drafting the Environmental Master Plan.



One of three young Northern Harriers fledged at Ranchlands Adopt-A-Pond in 2022.
Photo by Ian Turner.

Exciting Sightings

Early signs of this fall's songbird migration were reported by GN birders and others in mid to late August, during a prolonged heat wave and heat warnings of >30°C temperatures throughout Southeastern Alberta. During the Chronicle's summer hiatus there have been some exciting sightings reported as follows:

Bobolink- Dan Schiebelbein observed three Bobolinks along the Jackpot Road in the Cypress Hills on July 9th; the colourful breeding male Bobolink is black below, with a buffy hind neck, and white scapulars and rump. The species nests in hayfields and wet meadows. There are breeding records for the Cypress Hills.

Wood Warblers- Fall warblers can be a challenge to identify as some species display noticeably different spring and fall plumages, and with numerous first fall birds in the mix, they have been referred to in some guides as "confusing fall warblers". At a June 17th stopover at Tillebrooke Provincial Park, Bob Frew fortuitously detected audibly and then visually, a singing **Northern Parula** which had been reported by other birders earlier in June (accidental, less than 10 sightings in Alberta). On August 18th Police Point Park interpreter Ian Langill observed a **Canada Warbler** in the park. Several subsequent sightings of this species which is considered a casual vagrant in the west were reported by Ian and other GN birders. Warbler sightings on August 28th, possibly due to fallout were reported by Barry and Judy Anderson which included; **Black and White, Wilson's, and Tennessee, Ovenbird, and American Redstart** in the garden of their Ross Glen residence. A **Black-throated Green Warbler**, which is a very rare migrant in the west, was observed near the Police Point Nature Centre by Bob Frew on August 23rd. Dan Schiebelbein observed and photographed a **Mourning Warbler** also a very rare and casual migrant in the west, at Police Point Park on August 26th. Other warblers recently reported by GN birders were **Orange-crowned, Yellow, Magnolia, Wilson's, Yellow-rumped, Common Yellowthroat, Northern Waterthrush, and Palm Warbler** for an overall total of 16 warbler species.



Canada Warbler: Photo by Dan Schiebelbein



Northern Mockingbird- On July 27th, Milt and Elaine Spitzer were able to locate a Mockingbird which was reported previously by others on the Jenner School grounds in the Hamlet of Jenner AB, which is located along HWY 884 north of CFB Suffield. This species is considered an irregular vagrant that occasionally nests in the province, there are nesting records for Brooks and Lake Newell. The Mockingbird can be distinguished from the shrikes by its brownish colour and lack of a mask. Its white wing patch is visible in flight; the species is non-migratory, so finding it well outside its normal range makes it a true vagrant.
< **Northern Mockingbird: Photo by M. Spitzer**

Pacific Wren- This species formerly considered a subspecies of the Winter Wren, has returned to the Beaver Creek Trail in the Cypress Hills, according to a report on June 29th by a visiting Calgary birder. A similar sighting of this species in the same location was reported by Milt Spitzer on July 2nd, 2020.

Purple Martin- Phil Horch tallied 8 Purple Martins at a Purple Martin house in the Hamlet of Schuler while birding along HWY 41 on July 15th. The species has nested there for several years. Purple Martins are the largest of the swallow family; the male has a shiny blue-black plumage, while the female is duller, with a pale gray breast and abdomen. Purple Martins have a voracious appetite for flying insects including mosquitoes; some towns and cities have encouraged martins to nest in their communities as a natural control on insects, rather than relying on pesticides. The species is migratory, spending each spring and summer nesting throughout most of the USA and southern Canada, and winters in South America.

Hummingbirds- Ruby-throated, and a Rufous Hummingbirds showed up at a sugar/water feeder and also nectaring at the fuschia and Bergamot blooms in Dan and Carol Schiebelbein's garden in NE Crescent Heights on August 14th. The Ruby-throated hummingbird is an uncommon migrant on the northern plains, whereas the Rufous Hummingbird is a common migrant in the Rockies, with a few individuals reaching the western plains. The latter is highly aggressive and territorial, even in migration. It regularly drives larger hummingbirds from nectar sources, which makes it an unwelcome guest at some feeders. The Rufous breeds farther north than any other Hummingbird, whereas the Ruby-throated is the only hummingbird to breed east of the Mississippi River. These two species are the hummingbirds we are more likely to encounter locally during migration, although a Calliope Hummingbird was reported and photographed in Vista Heights (Southridge) in September 2020.

Blue-headed Vireo- Observed on September 9th by Bob Frew in Police Point Park following an overnight rainfall. This vireo species is a rare fall migrant in Southeastern Alberta.

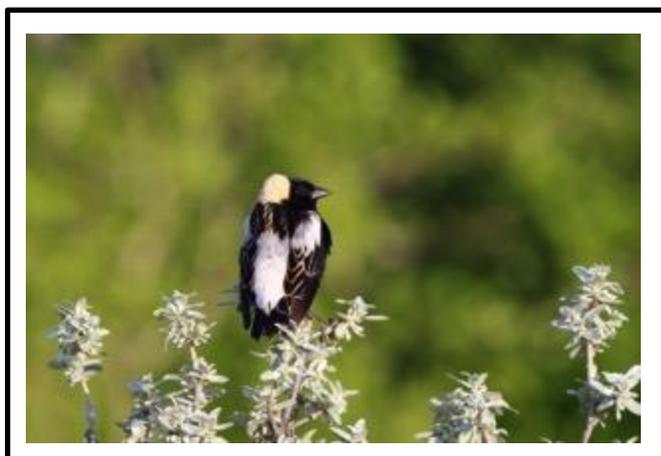
Note: There were few reports of grasslands birds. A breeding bird survey in June by Milt Spitzer tallied fewer sparrow species, and surprisingly no **Sprague's Pipits**, (nor the tinkling notes of their flight song). A singing **Grasshopper Sparrow** detected by Phil Horch at Echo Dale Regional park on June 21st, was one of the few reported. There have been few shorebirds reported at Sauder Reservoir due to high water levels.

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

Additional Photos by Dan Schiebelbein (dansnaturephotography.com)



Ruby-throated Hummingbird



Bobolink

Carol Porter Bluebird Trail: 2022

History

The original boxes, situated along the Eagle Butte Road, were put up in 1985 by Rob Gardner and Duncan MacIntosh. At this time there was a great concern regarding the rapidly disappearing bluebirds throughout North America due to the usurping of natural nesting cavities by introduced species such as the House Sparrow and European Starling. In 1992 Carol Porter took over the operation of the bluebird trail (had been a monitor of this trail since 1989). She expanded the trail to its present size and organized a team of assistants to monitor and maintain the boxes on the trail. Carol got her banding permit in 1998. She continued the supervision of the trail and her banding activities until her untimely death in 2009. Because of her efforts, the trail has been very successful in fledging many young Mountain Bluebirds. To honour Carol's dedication to this program the trail was renamed the "Carol Porter Bluebird Trail" in 2011.

A number of Carol's original monitoring team members are still active including Dee Cowan, and Randy and Lorraine Stotz (since 1996), Ric and Anne Carrier (since 2000), Sue Higgins and Donna Steele (since 2004), Mel Bender, and Beth and Ted Turner (since 2006), Others who have joined the team of monitors include: Jim and JoAnne MacFarlane, Ian and Angela Turner, Hugh and Dee Armstrong and Milt and Larry Spitzer. Long time team members Peggy and Mike Hansen and Dennis and Ann Hall retired this year. Fortunately we had three new teams, Len and Lindy Moser, Kelly Blair, and Bruce McLeod, join us this year. To all a hearty thank you for your dedication in aiding the successful fledging of Mountain Bluebirds which ensures that there will be a well sustained population for everyone to enjoy in the future. Without the dedicated volunteers the Mountain Bluebirds numbers would be much reduced.

2022 Breeding Results

In 2022 a total of 222 young bluebirds were fledged from a total of 296 eggs. The number of fledged nestlings was only slightly below the long term average of 239 and was a good recovery from last year's number of 172 (bad weather resulted in many frozen eggs and the number fledged was the lowest on record). A number of bluebird eggs disappeared early in the first laying this year likely due to competition from Tree Swallows and perhaps some do to predation. The highest number of bluebirds fledged was in 2016 (338).

Tree Swallows are in direct competition with the bluebirds for nesting boxes. Usually they arrive later than the bluebirds with the result that many of the boxes have already been claimed by the bluebirds. Although competition is often severe, the bluebirds can usually maintain ownership. Tree Swallows in their own right are a desirable species for their insect control but they are more numerous and are less dependent on man made boxes for successful nesting. This year a total of 280 Tree Swallows were fledged which is close to the long term average.

For more details and/or the historical records spread sheets contact Milt Spitzer at (403) 528-3120 or by email at milton.spitzer@gmail.com .



Mountain Bluebirds: Female on left and male on right: Photo by Milt Spitzer

Thick-billed Longspur: D Schiebelbein

Ruby-crowned Kinglet: D. Schiebelbein